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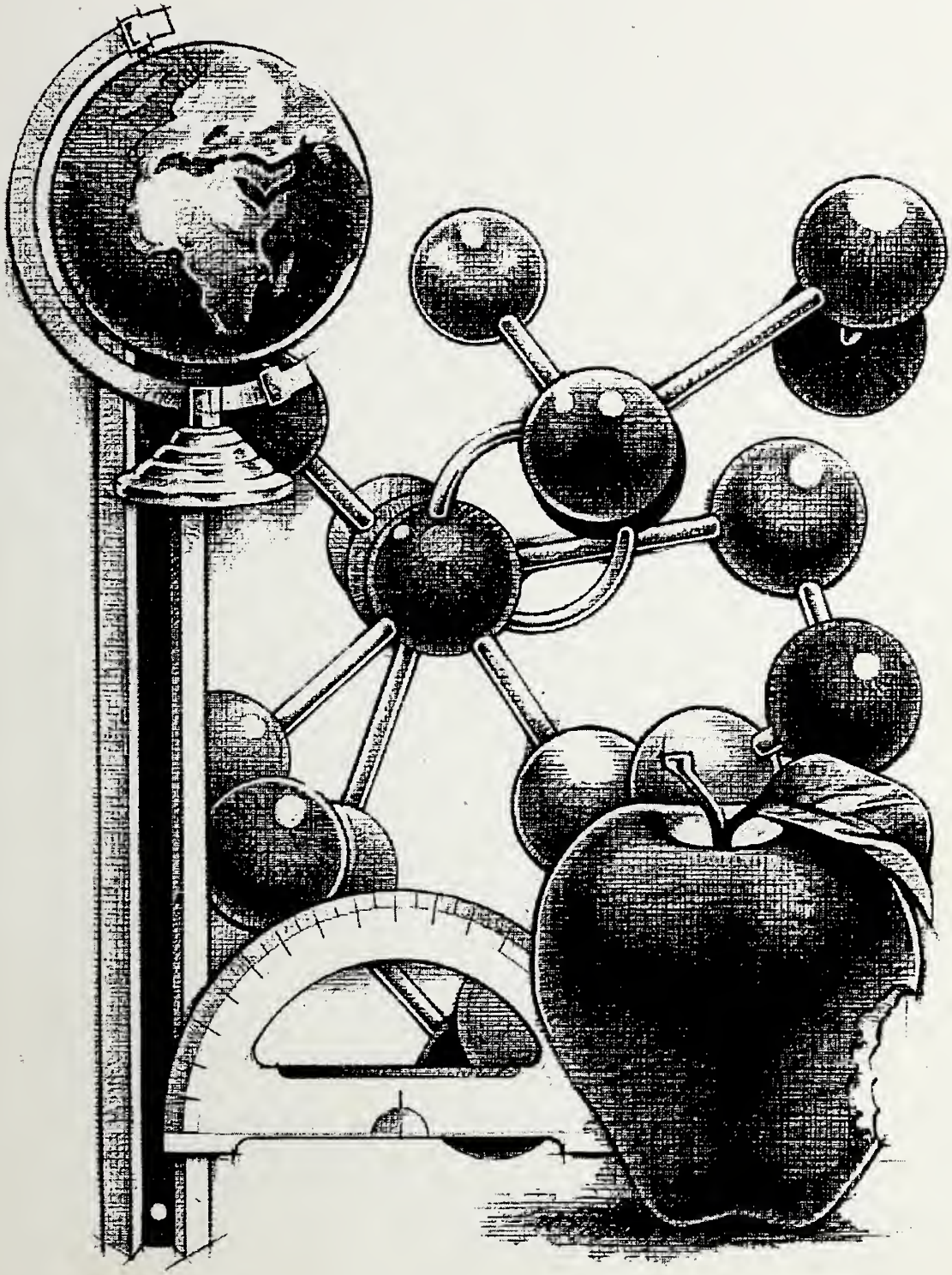

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Nicole's Kiss

Jeff Adams

It started with the first kiss
Waking this jaded lonely heart
From his solitary slumber
Filling his stomach with butterflies
Whose strength beat like dragon wings
Making his soul perform back flips
While his heart pounded
Like an obsessed door-to-door salesman
If it weren't for insomnia
He would insist this to be a dream
A subtle sleep walker's fantasy
But she is as real as he is
Only she is the sun
Brilliant and beautiful warming
Those who stand under her
And he is a lowly moon
Sitting cold and motionless in space
Waiting for her rays to warm his surface
And brighten him amongst the stars

Sketches

Jeff Adams

Time
Time is sucked in like smoke
    through a filter
Inhaled and exhaled in casual conversation
Time is a burglar wearing bells on a caper
Never to be captured
Forever to be seen
Time kisses the eyelids
    of our newborns and dead
Time is our enemy and reality's friend

*

Love
Love is a slowdance on a razorblade floor
Keeping the rhythm you'll never feel pain
Love is that geek picked last for a game
Not always the answer
But deserves to play
Love can conquer, Love can be consumed
Love is the monkey on everyone's back

*

God
God is the Marlboro man
    on a pack of easy answers
Quick are the questions, slow is the cancer
God is a statue at the bottom of the sea
God wants us to believe
But God won't let us see
God is the founder, the ruler, and taker
God is an idea that should be put to bed

*

Sex
Sex is a roller coaster that everyone rides
A thrill every second till somebody dies
Sex is an artist that's misunderstood
Sex is beautiful
Sex is obscene
Sex has been worshipped,
    sex has been cursed
Sex is a sport where the rules are rehearsed

*

Death
Death is a party that all are invited
Though its road is the fear of the destination
Death is the power we hold over our head
I'd die for my love
I'd kill for my friend
Death isn't a secret and doesn't pretend
Death is a room unlocked and ill-lighted

*

Joy
Joy is the goal in life's marathon
If you are winning you won't be for long
Joy will drop you
    and complain about its back
Never strong enough
To save all the meek
Joy is an after dinner cigarette in the nude
Joy is the mud on the bottom of our souls

*

Hope
Hope is a bluffer in a game of draw poker
You can't see his jokers but still see his eyes
Hope is a nervous man's flirt with disaster
Close your eyes and wait
Wish you could escape
Hope is always there like a pathetic friend
With destiny in the mirror hope
    is just around the bend

*

Untitled

Jeff Adams

A port, a prophet, a candle stick taker.
Kaleidoscope of cause and effect
Can lead you to the forgotten four gots.
Got number one, love, if it's true.
Got number two, sex, made for two.
The third got, called logic,
    is measured by intelligence.
This is the got I don't get for irony's sake.
The final got, is death at the end.
We all obtain this got, even give it to man.
Head for an eye.
Sugar for tooth.
While man's inner struggle
    is the definition for truth.
Hey batter-batter,
A swing, hit or miss.
To accept these four gots
    is to understand myths.

The Backdoor

Wayne Berscheid

The air was cold as I sat in the dimly lit room with a long sleeve shirt and a pair of old jeans on. A slowly burning Marlboro was pinched between my first two fingers. The smoke from the cigarette rose up and surrounded my head. On the other side of the room I saw a small and frail looking woman, she had a flowered

dress on and a pair of dirty, old, pink slippers that were almost hidden underneath the too big dress. To my left sat a young man about 23 years old. He was dressed in a pair of blue jeans and an old sweatshirt. To my right was the only natural source of light. A pair of picture windows that had a metal grating covering them filling the room with strange shadows that danced along the orange and grey tiled linoleum. About six people stood near the windows, their dark silhouettes cast no shadows on the floor. As if possessed by some unseen force they all moved in unison to a large brown table. A woman in a white dress and a pink sweater came over to me and handed me a small white cup and told me to take the pills. I put the pills in my mouth, and she handed me another small cup with water in it. I drank the water, carefully sliding the pills into the corners of my mouth where my wisdom teeth had once been. She told me to open my mouth, which I dutifully did, and then she asked me to lift up my tongue, I also complied to this request. She congratulated with a fake smile and said that I had done a good job. She walked away and moved on to the people sitting at the big table.

I spit the pills out and shoved them into my sock, hoping that my sweaty feet would dissolve the pills without anyone being the wiser. The morning silence had been interrupted by a clanging noise and the loud beep of the secured doors down the hallway being opened. A cart pushed by two angry looking Hispanic men stopped just short of the table where the six people were sitting and finishing their pills. The men stood there as another woman in a white dress and a pink sweater went to the cart and started calling out names. I put my cigarette out and pushed the butt into a metal container that was bolted down next to the chair that I was sitting in. I heard my name called, and I went and retrieved a green and beige container. I sat at the far end of the table and looked at the container in front of me. I opened it and immediately was overwhelmed by the smell of overcooked hard boiled eggs and the melted plastic of the lid. I glanced around and noticed that everyone was eating except the woman in the flowered dress. The food that was in front of me tasted bland and un-natural. Everyone had finished before me and then returned to the places that they had been in before this ritual began. I finished my meal and returned it to the cart where one of the ladies in a pink sweater wrote down what I had neglected to finish.

Instead of returning to my seat, I went and sat a few feet away from the woman who had not eaten anything. I asked her why she had not eaten. One of the ladies in pink came over and began listening to our conversation. I felt her only a few feet behind me and could smell a peppermint odor emanating from one of her orifices. The old lady in the flowered dress continued to explain why she had not gotten something to eat. She said that today would be her first day of shock treatment. She said she had had the therapy four other times, but it never seemed to help her do whatever it was supposed to help her do. I was taken by her bluntness and matter-of-fact attitude. The pink-sweater-lady continued to stand over us. The old woman began crying and repeating, "I don't want it, I don't want it, I don't want." Her voice drilled through my head as the pink-sweater-lady sat down next to her, and glared at me. The pink sweater-lady did not try and comfort the now bawling old-flowered-woman. Just then a wheelchair was brought out and the woman in the flowered dress was promptly deposited into it. I walked back to my chair and watched as she was rolled into the hall-

way and out of sight. I lit another Marlboro and took a long drag. The others in the room had returned to their places by the window and next to my chair. The old woman's couch was vacant and seemed almost like a memorial to her.

I sat there smoking my cigarettes for probably two hours before a group of well-dressed men entered the room. The group stopped and stood in front of each person in the room while one person told horrible stories about the person they stood in front of. These stories were heard by everyone in the room. I heard stories about slashed wrists, overdoses, fixations, gunshots and even attempted hangings. The group finally came over to where I was sitting. The leader of the group looked at me. I stood up and introduced myself to the group. The leader seemed shocked and speechless. I told the group how I had slashed my wrists the wrong way, how I took two bottles of Tylenol, and how I tried it hang myself just three days earlier. I rationalized each act by identifying the "backdoors" of each planned suicide. I cut the wrists in the wrong direction and only deep enough to bleed but not deep enough to cut a tendon and cause any loss of feeling in my fingers. I explained how I had drunk 2 pints of Smirnoff Vodka before taking the Tylenol. I explained that I had hanged myself with dura string with a weight capacity of 100 pounds, which had broken in two minutes. The leader had a look of disbelief and said he would come back and speak to me later. The group quickly moved on, and I lit another cigarette.

The old lady in the flowered dress returned in a wheelchair. I noticed a couple of brown stains on either side of her temples and an unusual smell coming from her. Her hair was a tangled mess and she had a look of disorientation on her face. I saw her but she did not seem to recognize me. It had only been three to three and half hours since our last conversation. The ladies in pink sweaters had gone to retrieve more medication for the group, so I took a seat next to her on the couch. I poked her arm and she did not even acknowledge the physical contact. She wore only one of her pink slippers, and now I noticed a tear forming in her right eye. I asked how she was doing. She gave no response. I held her hand for about five minutes before a lady in a pink sweater entered the room. I moved back to my seat but did not stop staring at the woman in the flowered dress. The lady in the pink sweater came over and gave me a small white cup with pills in it. I went through the same routine as I had gone through earlier in the morning. Once again the angry looking Hispanic men came in with the cart of green and beige plastic containers. I ate the bland food and the lady in the pink sweater recorded that I only drank 6 ounces of my decaf tea. The woman in the flowered dress once again did not eat even though the lady in the pink sweater had called out her name for lunch. Another lady-in-pink rolled the woman out of the room and down the hallway.

I went to my room and fell into my bed. I remembered the growing number of pills in my sock and removed all six of them and looked around the room. I thought about flushing them, but a strainer had been placed in the toilet. The room had a beige heater on the far wall and the fan was constantly blowing. I dropped all six of the pills into the heater and they fell through to the black abyss at the bottom of the beige monster.

I fell back into bed and began crying. The old woman's face came into my mind, and I felt immensely sorry for her. I cried myself

asleep and dreamt about the old lady and the shock chamber. I was awakened by a man's voice. He kept saying "Wake up!" I turned over and saw the leader of the group from earlier. He had a smile on his face and was patting me on my back.

I got up and looked plainly at him. He asked how I was feeling. I responded that I was feeling fine. He took a long look at me and asked if I was going to try to commit suicide again. I simply replied "no." He said that he believed me and that I should consider myself lucky he was going to release me today and not keep me around for the mandatory 72 hours. He said I could leave whenever I wanted. I wanted to ask him about the old lady in the flowered dress, but thought better of it. I gathered the few things that I had and put them into a mauve-colored bag supplied by one of the ladies in the pink sweaters. I went to the front area and another lady in a pink sweater gave me my belt, my shoelaces, and my electric razor. I placed them into the mauve bag and took a long look at the room. Six figures stood guard at the picture windows, holding back the reality that was the setting sun. I did not see the old lady. I was escorted down the hallway and out the front door by one of the angry looking Hispanic men who had rolled the cart for breakfast and lunch. He still looked angry. I walked down the street and lit a Marlboro, I pictured the flowered dress woman's face and felt an urge to cry again. However, I did not cry, I haven't cried since then. I figure that I have nothing to cry about considering that woman will be getting shock treatment and eating the bland food for the rest of her life.

Untitled

Wayne Berscheid

The following "grotesque" is a parody of a distorted children's story. The characters, their descriptions, and the story line have been altered without the author's permission. Her story, which was aimed at pre-schoolers to pre-teens taught that kindly mature "Mr. Mikes" were common in our 1970's American communities trying to raise children to lead good moral lives. Mr. Mike in her story taught a little boy that he should always share his toys with his friends because otherwise his friends would cease to like him. [Editor's note]

The afternoon was warm as the familiar jingle of "Pop Goes the Weasel" was carried in by a vagrant wind. Tom and his best friends, Sam and Jack, were sitting in the grass not far from the street. The grinding music of the ice cream truck slowly grew louder and louder. The boys looked at each other knowing who was driving that truck. The truck was in need of a new paint job. A small mural on the side of the truck read "...Mr. Mike's ice cream...just for kids..." Something else was written on the truck; however, the boys could never quite make it out. Everyday that same truck would pull up, and a strange man would beckon them to the side door of the ice cream vehicle. Normally the strange man would give each one of them a free ice cream sandwich. The man in the truck wore a small device just to the left of his big belt buckle. The device seemed very small to Tom sitting so close to that large, brass buckle. Today the man motioned for Tom to come up real close to the ice cream truck.

"Do you wanna touch it?" the man asked, showing Tom and his friends his yellow stained teeth.

"What does that thing do?" Tom asked skeptically.

"Push here and find out..." the man paused, chuckling softly to himself. "Go ahead or are you chicken?"

Tom thought about this for a brief second, and then reached out his little quivering hand. He touched the cold metal change machine that sat just inches away from that almost magical belt buckle. Tom felt the man's hand close around his wrist. The ice cream man's hand was wrinkled and very hairy. It also seemed much too warm for an ice cream man. Tom let out a little shriek.

"L..Le..Let go!!" Tom shouted, although he could not hide his fear. His ten-year-old voice quivered and threatened to sob. Sam and Jack ran off as fast as they could.

The man laughed and forced Tom's hand onto the metal device just next to his belt buckle. Two coins fell out of the device, and the man released Tom.

"Hey mister...what's the big deal?" Tom asked still sounding scared.

"Just a test, little boy." Mr. Mike sneered. "Do you like my tests, little boy?" Every time the man would say 'boy', his foul breath filled Tom's face.

Tom wanted to run, but he was frozen in the strange man's gaze. He felt as if his feet were nailed to the ground. Mr. Mike grabbed him by his shirt and pulled him harshly into the truck. Tom felt the warmth of the man's hand close around his mouth as Mr. Mike took off his belt with his other hand. Tom could feel the dank breath of the man against his cheek as Mr. Mike pulled him closer. Mr. Mike was muttering something that Tom could not quite make out. Mr. Mike tied Tom's hands behind his back with the belt. Mr. Mike than picked him up and threw him into a cooler on the far end of the truck. The cooler was not running, and Tom could smell the odor of old dairy products. The top of the cooler was shut and Tom was in complete darkness. He could feel the truck begin to move and the droning of "Pop Goes the Weasel" began again.

Tom felt the truck stop and start several times. He assumed that the truck was still delivering ice cream, despite his being locked in its bowels. Tom tried screaming but could tell the noise was absorbed by the surrounding walls. The truck finally came to a long stop. The top of the cooler was removed and a rush of fresh air filled the boy's lungs. Mr. Mike was standing over the cooler, smirking. Mr. Mike had a bulge in his bottom lip. Tom had seen baseball players with that same bulge on their faces. However, Tom had a feeling that Mr. Mike did not play ball.

"Get your ass out of that cooler, little boy." The words terrified Tom.

"I..I don't wanna." Tom replied, a little more defiant then he had planned.

"I don't care what you want, little boy. You are here and nobody is gonna stop me from doin' what I wanna' do." Mr. Mike spat a large glob of brown goop just inches from Tom.

Without giving Tom a chance to respond, Mr. Mike pulled him from the cooler and carried him out of the truck. They were inside what appeared to be a garage. Mr. Mike carried Tom through the cluttered garage.

"Stop that sniveling, little boy..." the ice cream man hissed, "do you like my house?" Mr. Mike had carried Tom through a doorway into a dingy room that may have been a kitchen at one time. Mr. Mike saw the fear in the little boy's eyes and laughed loudly. His yellowed teeth shown brightly against the brown glop that hovered just below his gum line. He took Tom into another room adjacent to the "kitchen" and tied him down with a rope that was sitting on a rickety old bed. The bed con-

sisted of a striped mattress, stained with yellow and brown circles. Tom did not know what the stains were, nor did he know what kind of animal was sitting in the corner of the room.

"Mr. Mike...let me go please..." begged Tom.

"Shut-up, you little brat..." Mr. Mike replied, "or I'll give you a reason to beg!"

"P...Please, Mr. Mike. I want to go home."

"Don't we all, little boy...don't we all..." Mr. Mike muttered something else; however, Tom could not make out what it was.

Mr. Mike tied Tom's feet to the base of the bed frame and his hands to the headboard. Tom felt like he was being stretched. Without a single word, Mr. Mike left the room and locked the door behind him. Tom had almost forgotten about the animal that was hiding in the corner. Tom looked over and saw that it was not an animal at all. It was another boy, probably no more than 12 or 13 years old. The child was very dirty and kept his back to Tom. Tom called out to the boy.

"Hey...Hey you..Help me please."

No response.

"C'mon help me out!"

No response.

Tom looked around again and realized that the boy did not even move. He saw ropes tied to the childs' wrists and ankles. The ropes were frayed at the ends. It seemed as if the ropes were a permanent part of the child's arms. A noticeable white area was visible underneath the ropes around the child's ankle. Tom could not see much more from his point of view. Tom began to cry and scream for help.

Mr. Mike came storming in the room. He was dark red and seemed to be really angry.

"Don't you be crying, little boy! I am going to be ready for you in no time."

"Let me go, mister...what's wrong with that kid over there?"

"Don't you worry about it, little boy."

Mr. Mike left again. This time he left the door open, and Tom could see that Mr. Mike was rummaging around in the kitchen. He heard the strange man humming "Pop Goes the Weasel." The belt that Mr. Mike had tied him up with was sitting just below his right arm. He could see the brass buckle staring right back up at him. The buckle actually seemed to be a small box with a hidden compartment. Mr. Mike entered the room again and looked at Tom with an evil smile. Mr. Mike had his hands behind his back and hummed the familiar tune that Tom was beginning to hate. Mr. Mike pulled a large knife out from behind his back. Tom began to shake with fear.

"Hey mister...what's goin' on?"

"Hey...hey...little boy?...oh yes, little boy...it is time now."

"T...T...Time for what?"

The old man let out a bone-chilling laugh, and approached Tom slowly. The knife was shiny silver and was immaculately clean compared to the rest of the apartment. Mr. Mike quickly turned around and approached the kid near the corner. Amazingly enough Mr. Mike kicked the child.

"Shut-up, you little brat...your brother here needs to be introduced to the rest of the family."

He kicked the child again, but the child did not move. The child fell back and exposed the lifeless and faceless body of a decomposing teenager. The child did not have any apparent scars or mutilation on its face, yet there were no normal features such as eyes, a mouth, or even a dent where a nose should have been. Mr. Mike approached Tom again.

"You like what you see, little boy? Well...I hope so because that is in your future." With that remark Mr. Mike quickly stepped toward

Tom, grabbed his ear and with one swoop of the knife his ear was sliced neatly from his head. Tom cried out mostly with fear but then in pain. Mr. Mike quickly put a rag next to Tom's head and tied it tightly. He then walked out of the room, with the ear still in his hand.

"Thanks, little boy..." Tom heard Mr. Mike mutter.

Tom whimpered, then blacked out.

When he regained consciousness, Tom thought it was the next day. Tom could not tell because the windows were blacked out. With his good ear, Tom heard Mr. Mike returning to the room. Tom noticed then that he was no longer wearing the rag. Mr. Mike came over to him and looked at his ear.

"Looks OK to me. How does it feel, little boy?" Mr. Mike chuckled.

Tom did not respond.

Mr. Mike carried a small box in with him. The box had black shaded plastic surrounding it and it seemed to be humming. Mr. Mike had that ugly belt buckle on and the strange change machine was sitting right next to it. Mr. Mike took the belt off and opened the hidden compartment in the back of it. He shook it a little bit and a few small objects fell out. The objects were no bigger than Tom's own thumbnail. Mr. Mike showed him one of the objects. Mr. Mike could barely hold the object still, because he was laughing so hard. Tom got a good look at it. It looked like a small walnut. He eased his head forward enough to get real close to it. The object was shaped sort of like an oval. It had a couple of small grooves running up and down the edges of it. Tom immediately noticed that it kind of resembled an ear, but a very small dry ear.

"Hey, little boy...wanna see yours?" He carefully placed the ear back in the compartment in his belt buckle and then reached for the black humming device.

Tom leaned forward and peered into the box as the old man opened it. He saw a small piece of slightly bloody flesh sitting in front of him. Tom recognized it as his ear. Mr. Mike let out a howl of laughter.

"Tonight I git the other ear and tomorrow the left eye and the next day the right eye and the next day your nose and finally I will sew up your lips and then clean your face up with a new piece of skin. Look at that little boy over there. Doesn't he look happy?"

He laughed again and motioned toward the corpse sitting in the corner of the room. Tom began to weep, but nobody heard him, ever.

Birds on an Overcast Day

Mary Bowden

Little brown fat fairies
swarm on our property
picking and pecking their beaks
in the mucky, gray gravel.
They swim and dance
in rainwater in the gutters.
Others climb up and under
our rusty red van.
Once rain starts again,
they flutter away
to a nearby tree.

Speechless

Jamie Cantwell

"Jamie, wait up!" Jane shouted down the hall to me. I really hated when she did this to me, but somehow I could never tell her.

I went off to the side of the hallway by the lockers and waited for her. After struggling to get through the crowd for a while, she finally came up to me with a smile and about ten thick books cradled in her arms. I guess the reason why she carried so many is that she was afraid to be late to class.

"So, what did you do over the weekend?" Jane asked as we walked to chemistry class.

"Not much, I just sat around with my cousins and went shopping a couple times," I said. I never told Jane what I really did on the weekends, because I thought that would make her feel odd, since she always did absolutely nothing.

We approached the end of the hall by the senior lockers where our chemistry class was. I noticed a group of girls in the corner whispering and looking Jane up and down. At that moment, I couldn't help feeling sorry for her. But then again, she seemed to care nothing about what others thought. Since we were juniors I guess she'd kind of got use to it. Besides the fact that Jane gave me too many compliments, I thought that she was a pretty decent person.

We went inside the classroom and set down our books. As others started coming in, I joked with them. Jane just remained quiet, checking her homework. A few people came up to her and asked how she did certain problems. She was always very helpful to them, even though she probably knew that they talked behind her back.

Just because her complexion wasn't the greatest and she was sort of quiet, everyone treated her as an outcast.

Class seemed to go by very slowly, but lunch was next. I sat at the edge of my seat getting ready to dash to the cafeteria as soon as the bell rang.

When it did, I rushed out, and totally forgetting that I usually went with Jane. *Oh well, I'll meet her there,* I thought.

As I was in line paying for my hamburger, I saw Jane come in and take her usual seat. She was starting to get on my nerves. I couldn't do anything without her. If I did, she always made me feel guilty, like I was trying to get rid of her or something.

I walked over to the table and sat down next to Jane. "Sorry I ran out like that, I am so starving." I said.

She smiled and said, "No problem, I'm starving too." Jane always brought a lunch from home.

I don't think her family had much money.

As we were eating, my other friends joined us. I knew they weren't fond of the idea of Jane's being there, but they thought that I needed to get good grades. I never really had the courage to tell them any different.

Finally the bell rang and my favorite class was next, gym. While the rest of us gathered our garbage and threw it away, Jane was still at the table packing up her pile of books. "I'll meet you in the locker room, Jamie." Jane yelled out.

"O.K." I replied.

We went into the locker room and started changing into our gym clothes. I thought it was kind of weird that Jane still wasn't there yet. *She'll be here any minute,* I thought to myself.

Just then one of my friends, Diane said, "Hey Jamie, why is that Jane girl hanging around you so much lately?"

"I don't know." I said quickly, hoping someone would change the subject.

"Why don't you just tell her to go away?" Melissa said.

"You guys, she's not that bad." I said.

"Yah, right. She follows you around like a little puppy dog." Sandy said loudly.

I wish I'd had the courage to stand up for Jane, but I didn't. All I did was giggle like a fool, like the rest of them.

After the laughter quieted, I said, "I feel kinda sorry for the poor girl. Nobody likes her."

"That's because she's gay!" Sandy burst out, laughing.

All I had the guts to say was, "Be quiet before she comes in."

"Maybe she has a crush on you, Jamie. Maybe that's why she's always by you." Melissa said.

We were all quieted by the sound of a flushing toilet. I crossed my fingers and hoped that Jane wouldn't come out. All of our eyes were on that stall.

The door creeked open and out came Jane. Her face was as red as a tomato, and she had tears flowing from her eyes. She didn't look at any of us. She walked out with her head down and slammed the door behind her.

I will never forget the feeling that I had in my stomach at that time. "Why didn't I say something." I thought. My friends just stood there in astonishment. I think that it was then that I realized just how ignorant we were.

I left the locker room and ran into the gym hoping to catch Jane. She was sitting on the bleachers, hunched over with her hands over her eyes. I knew that this was my only chance to explain to her.

I approached her hesitantly. The minute I sat down, she exploded. "You and your friends are such bitches!" She spoke in the meanest voice I had ever heard come from her. "You especially! Why didn't you tell them I'm not gay? How could you laugh along with them and let them talk about me like that?"

I was still speechless. I didn't know what the hell to say to her. I didn't think there was anything I could say to make her feel any better.

"The reason why I don't have a boyfriend is because of my looks. You're the only person in this entire school who ever pretended to like me." She said. "And what's that you said about only hanging around me because you feel sorry for me." Jane added.

"No, that was all just a big lie." I spat out.

"You know what, Jamie, save your pity! Screw you and this whole school!" Then she stormed through the heavy gym doors.

Where in the hell does she think she's going? I thought. Everyone in the gym was staring at me, probably disappointed that there wasn't a fight. "Duh!" I shouted. My words echoed in the gym. Everybody went back to what they were doing. When it came down to fighting, they were a bunch of cowards.

I couldn't get Jane off my mind. All I could think of in class that afternoon was how I would feel if that ever happened to me. My thoughts were cluttered.

The only thing I could figure to do was to wait for her to come to school the next day. The next morning I came early, like Jane always did, hoping to catch her. As I waited, I noticed a bunch of girls go by whispering. *Great, now everyone probably thinks I'm gay too!* I thought. Then, *I don't care any more what people think. That's what got me into this hole.*

I waited until the bell rang, and then walked slowly down the hall hoping to see Jane's acne-scarred face. There was no one to ask about her.

Jane never came to school that day, or any day after that. The word was that she moved to a different state to live with her grandparents in Iowa.

I was left with the guilt that I had ruined someone's life, and thought I would never be able to explain myself or apologize.

I am now twenty years old and still think of Jane and the lesson she taught me. I know now to never take advantage of good friends. The old saying, "You don't know what you got till it's gone" is very true. Jane maybe was the best friend that I ever had or ever will have.

I live with the guilt of losing my only true friend. I can't help wondering if Jane ever found a true friend, because I know I wasn't, and I regret it to this day...

I hope Jane found a true friend in Iowa. She deserved one, and I had the chance, but I failed miserably. I'd like to think that she'd read this story someday and feel better about herself — and about me.

Eleven

Jessica Canupp

I was scared
of somehow absorbing
unidentifiable
substances
through my skin
and it attacked my
brain
interrupting my
compulsion
till it turned
to obsession
making me
cry
till salt
turned into
blood

A Poem to Emily Dickinson

Jessica Canupp

Never could
comprehend
your poems
in class
Shrouded in
veils of
white secrecy
Nonsensical words
of feminine
melancholy struggles
With phrases
that swallow me
whole
On every
page
and I get
trapped
just like you.

Two
Jessica Canupp

fascination
with tiny feet
and hands
studying, walking
the act of balancing
leaping over
unimpressed
black shadows

Untitled
Jessica Canupp

I met eyes
with a hitchhiker
aimless
with no map
insight
thumb pointing
at me
maybe I should
stop . . .
Instead I forget
his weathered
face
and his thumb
and speed up
meeting his back
in the rearview
mirror

Untitled
Jessica Canupp

I saw you
today
With a fiery red
shirt on
A shirt I remember
well
From times when we'd
go out together
We'd escape
into summer
You met my eyes
In passing
Surprise flickering
dancing across your
face
But,
I just looked away
As if
I didn't know who you
were.

Business As Usual
E.L. Gallagher

nineteen, lord make me mortal tonight
dig my grave, carve the headstone,
    seal the coffin tight
nineteen, too many years to count
i don't ask for each day as they mount
friends, not friends really at all

family tree, but the vine's half up the wall
and the bar is packed with mouths
    that can't help but drink
there i was, too old for young peoples' fun
too young for better things,
    i wish i was twenty-one
too tired to be nineteen years old
too many fires burning to feel this cold
it's business as usual 'round here,
    this time, this place
everything i long to hold, i have to chase
am not a little hermit, or a statistic
i am the most horrible thing
    that ever existed
sometimes i pray for a freak accident
    to proceed
giving me every possible reason i need
to twist the long branches of fate
and bring myself to st. peters gate
lord, if you're out there, hear this plea
save the world, but sacrifice me
i shall be the christ child's second coming
pound the nails in, i'm numb and numbing
with so much to die for
    and nothing that will function
the biggest sin would be my reproduction.

Butterfly Fiasco

E.L. Gallagher

Butterfly comes in the house, I kill it
The end of the world wants
    to haunt you, will it?
It doesn't have to
But every time there's a tornado warning
And every time your president decides
    to get involved with other countries
You take on the burden of losing
    the one thing you long to defend-
    your life.
Just like that butterfly who assumes
    it's going to live
Long enough to peer at your flowers
And make its way back alive,
It ends up being swatted to mere memories.
So think about that the next time
    you swear to Holy God that
You will call the cops the next time
    he kicks your ass
But I know you, you'll wimp out
    and nestle your bleeding face
In a little cubby hole
    that's just big enough to hide
    your deranged
And ever so warped head.
Hopefully when you find yourself
    desperate without him, you choose
Option A instead of B.
B being the choice that you shove
    that fully loaded Saturday night special
Down your mouth and gracefully squeeze
    the trigger as your $2,000
Panasonic camcorder with megazoom
    gets everything from your good-bye
Speech, to your bloody brains
    splattering all over tape.

Option A, being the drug of choice.

cramp
E.L. Gallagher

fetal position
womb-like state
overriding underlying hate
curled up in a ball
hunched over like a toad
the end of the rope or the end of the road?
floating in a bathtub
so many aspirin, so little sleep
drowning in a pain so deep.

On Behalf of God
E.L. Gallagher

What does God want?
He wants something or
    He wouldn't be knocking.
Just a prankster who rings the doorbell
And runs away?
Or, maybe He's the punch line
In a knock-knock joke
Always making us laugh.
"Somebody's knocking at the door
Somebody's ringing the bell
Do me a favor,
Open the door
And let him in."
Paul McCartney put it well.
But maybe,
Just maybe
God's waiting to see more
Welcome mats.

Mortal Love
E.L. Gallagher

turning down sheets, ready to climb in bed
realizing only in death am I dead
so unsatisfied with the meaning of life
wishing I had the guts to end it
a shank... a gun... a knife
love is a weapon, send it
send me your love.
I'll kill it.

An Ode to Harpo
E. L. Gallagher

Everything he ever said and promised
    to go through with has diminished
Into a can of Budwieser beer crumpled
    in his clenched palm.
I still believe that ignorance is the root
    of an evil flower

But how sweet its fragrance,
    how beautiful its petals
How cunning its disguise.

The heart inside a man who inhales
    Newport after Newport
Must be rotting a slow
    and unconscious death right now.
Although he refuses to accept his feelings
    as terminal
I'll continue to remind him what a shame
    it is to see him go
Because eventually he will.

Everything this drop-out touches
Disappears or rots
As he sadly fades into the night
Never satisfying our hope that
He would prove us wrong.

Pregnant Child

E.L. Gallagher

See, I've got this pen, this paper,
    these dreams
Each poem like a page in a diary
I am impregnated by all of these hopes
But they miscarry more often than not
And every hope truly means a lot
Only they are short lived
And they flush out faster
    than they came into being.

Yet, I have this reoccurring idea
That all will turn out just as I planned
All will surpass the enemy of time
They will grow inside a gentle womb
Only later will they descend under a tomb
For not I will parent them to freedom
That is how I want my infants to mature.

Scenes from a Laundromat

E.L. Gallagher

Life is a clothes dryer
It goes around and around
Scattering things randomly
But overall there is an
Ongoing pattern
Of systematic spins
But when life ends
Quarters don't work.

small poem

E. L. Gallagher

who will age with me?
who has the strength to keep
these vows so vital
a love so deep...and this concerns me
...and I am up at night losing sleep.

Sometimes the World Reminds Us of Funny Things

E.L. Gallagher

I used to think I'd gain my beauty back
If I cut it down to a half a pack
I used to think I'd hear Satanic words
If I played my records backwards
So much for thinking
And so much for drinking
Because that's where these thoughts
    rooted from
The bottle had proved what was yet to come.
I flew off several handles
I lit a few dozen candles
And I blew up the world you know
It really happened,
    but I have nothing to show
For everything I did with no reason
For nothing that came out of last season.
I have been drinking rum and coke
I have been exhaling cigarette
Smoke
And this is hardly the end.

Sunken Vessel

E.L. Gallagher

Although I notice squall lines nearing
There is so much that I am not fearing
Like being the person I could never be
Like being put to rest at sea.

And if this tide washes me away
I'll have the hope that someday
You'll be the sailor to find my remains
Floating through swells of pleasant rains.

turn on me

E.L. Gallagher

I have seen the wrinkles quicken
wouldn't you expect me to look past them?
Well, they bother me, quite frankly
every time you cast them.

I want to touch you somehow
I don't like the way you turn on me
You used to be my candle in the darkness
now you just burn on me.

I wonder who would put you up to it
Or if this is your wrinkled way
Of letting me know there is no more room
for a person who cannot stay.

Wanting

E.L. Gallagher

Wanting to love
Wanting to hold onto something
Other than jealousy and revenge
And something more than the undesirable
I choose you
I can't explain why.

Wanting to want
Wanting to know what it's like
For one minute to be at evens
With any other human being

I choose you
You'll never understand.

Needing to believe
In something other than myself
In someone other than the image
That's cast before me at the mirror
Please let it be you,
Please let it be you.

excited
Shirlene Holden

Always excited to be
    near you
    holding you
    caressing you
    touching you
    loving you
    talking to you

Always with my mind on you.

Untitled
Tim Kelly

aNtS mArCh AlOnG NuMb.
pOrScHe. GuCcI. bEvErLy HiLlS.
nO cOnCeRn FoR tHeSe.

Untitled
Tim Kelly

Man and woman lie
Together. Man leaves. We call
This evolution?

Sensory Defensiveness
D. Jean Marsh

"It doesn't feel good,"
    the senses say.
Please make the stimulus
    go away.
Neural transmitters
    race to the scene
to excite the atoms
    in acetylcholine.

Neurological problems
    we don't understand.
"Why can't clothes feel good?"
    sufferers demand.
Tactile sensitivity
    needs to be explored-
the synaptic gap
    where acetylcholine is stored.

Endocrine problems
    -how do they relate?
Are they more the cause
    for our sensory state?
If hormones are secreted
    at too fast a rate,

will your sensory integration
disintegrate?

Is the problem in
neurons, dendrites or brain?
Pituitary, thyroid or chemicals
to blame?
We need answers;
it's becoming more acute
Let's research and experiment
and make the point mute.

New Beginnings

JeNeen Maselskis

The telephone was ringing in my dream. I woke up to find myself answering it. Damn, it's reality. I couldn't believe the voice asking hello was mine. The next thing I heard on the other end was even more unbelievable. Officer, officer what? I didn't care what his name was. When someone called you at three in the morning with the name of officer whoever, it meant something bad. I sat up but couldn't find the lamp. The man on the other end was saying something along the lines of coming down to see my son.

"What has he done now?" I asked him irritated.

"Ma'am we chased him through two towns." The officer informed me.

"On foot?" I asked sarcastically.

"No, in the squads. Your son refused to pull over and chose to speed up. He ran his car into the side of the centennial building. We suggest that you and your husband come down here to Host Hospital right away.

"Hospital? Is he okay?"

By now my husband was wide awake shaking his head. This three in the morning routine was all too familiar to him. This time, though, it was different.

It isn't the usual come get your son, he's drunk, he's received a D.U.I., or he needs bond money to get out of jail. This time he has gone as far as my husband and I knew he would go. It seemed there was nothing we could do to stop his actions. He barely graduated and he has had numerous jobs. Each and every one of them, he was fired from.

I ask myself over and over again, where did I go wrong? I was a good mother and Matt was a good father. Do my child's actions reflect upon us? It's not fair! Where does this kid get his stubbornness from? He doesn't want to do the right thing. He always chooses the wrong thing to do and all the wrong decisions to make. How can I guide him when he won't let me?

The rain was coming down faster than the windshield wipers could clear it. *Oh, Lord, please let him be okay and I pray that no one was with him either. How badly hurt is he?* I wondered. *Oh Chad, why? Why do you have to defy us all the time? We know more than you. We know what's best for you.* I've said these things a million times to him; he just doesn't get it.

"Are you okay?" Matt asked me.

"Yeah, I'm fine." I lied.

Matt pulled the car smoothly in the parking spot. *Oh why can't Chad learn to be more like his dad?*

The front desk nurse showed us right where to go. *Oh no,* I thought. Intensive care unit, not good. Nothing could have prepared us for what we saw when we walked in there. He had no hair! It struck me weird, but Chad took such pride in his hair, and now seeing it all shaved off with a big white bandage around his head, was creepy.

It took us a moment for each of us to grab a bruised and swollen hand, almost afraid to touch him.

I wonder if Matt felt just as terrible as I did. How could we have said all those horrible things about him behind our bedroom door? We called him stupid and brainless, and here he lies brain dead in a hospital bed.

"He and his friend Danny Homen were driving at high speed. They both were very intoxicated." The office told me with regret.

It doesn't surprise me. Chad has been sneaking alcohol since he's been fifteen years old. The center we put him in for kids helped for a while, but high school was too tough for him. He broke. Chad was an ideal model for some one dealing with peer pressure. He was a follower, yet tonight he was driving. *What was he leading though? And another question that comes to mind is what was he following? What was the point of joy riding around until the police get suspicious and pull you over? What was going through his mind when he tried to outrun the police? Worst of all, what were Chad and Danny thinking when they hit head on into that building?*

"Brain dead? What does that mean? He'll just never be better?" I cried to the doctor.

"I'm afraid not, Mrs. Jacobs. I'm sorry, the impact was just too strong."

The doctor was trying his best to tell me nicely and calmly that my son was brain dead. I didn't care. I wanted Chad back. To hell with the medical terms and all. He's lying here, he's my son, he's breathing, he's not dead!

Light was coming to a strong focus now. It was hurting my eyes. *Oh great,* I thought to myself. Matt was trying to calm me. *Poor guy,* I thought, *he'll have to leave me just because I know I'll never be the same. I'll be a basket case for the rest of my life.*

"What am I doing wasting time lying here? My son needs me." I moaned.

"Julie, you fainted. Take it easy. Chad isn't going anywhere." My husband was telling me from this small room with just a bed in it.

"Don't remind me." I said, looking away from him.

"Honey, I know this is hard but . . . "

My husband of eighteen years was crying. He had every reason to. Our son was technically dead and for the last four years Chad has proved time and time again how disrespectful he could be. He was arrogant, and he adamantly did everything we told him not to.

His back was toward me. What could I do? I had a lump the size of my fist in my throat. All I could manage was a loud choking sob. Matt was at my side in a flash. He held me until the doctor walked in.

"Excuse me, Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs."

"Oh, it's okay." I sat up, anxiously awaiting good news from him.

"Has anything changed doctor?" Matt whispered with hope.

"Uh, no I'm afraid not. The damage is pretty severe and . . . permanent." He stammered. "His friend died on impact. I'm very sorry."

I couldn't believe it. The doctor, the professional, the god of medicine was telling us that Chad and Danny were dead and there was no bringing them back. The numbing feeling that came over me was sickening. I can't cope. Help me, God. I'm falling, I'm weak, I can't help

myself. I love you, Chad, please know that. I need you to hear me one last time.

So this was it. This is where we find a way to say good-bye to our son. This is not real.

Our families are all here. They are filling my son's hospital room. *Who cares, I don't want anyone here. I'm being selfish and I don't care. I want Chad back! Is there any possible way that Chad would ever come out of this?*

Please let there be a miracle and let him start moaning and calling out for us. Oh, God, I'm babbling and dreaming up things that only happen on soap operas. Oh, good Lord, help me. How do I say good-bye to my son?

Everyone is hugging and crying. I don't want anyone to touch me. Please everyone stop talking to me. I don't care one bit what you have to say. Oh no I'm spinning again. I don't want to faint. My husband and my son need me. My beautiful son that I have loved the first moment I knew I was pregnant. I must admit, he did bring me a lot of joy and laughter. My little boy not yet grown up, and yet it ends here. It's not fair.

I knew at that very moment I was never going to be able to pull that plug. My son was living as long as he was lying there. I could come in every other day and visit and it wouldn't seem like he was dead. Snap out of it, Julie! Get a grip! You are fantasizing again.

A light touch on my shoulder brought me to the present. Now who is touching me? I though bitterly to myself.

"Mrs. Jacobs? I'm Danny's mom. I'm so sorry."

No more words were exchanged. We clung to each other. We were both desperate somehow to bring our sons back to life. This felt good.

Not like hugging my husband, but so much better than hugging a relative. This was different. This woman knew what I was experiencing. I could bet her thoughts were similar to mine. But her son was dead; mine was waiting to be legally dead.

"How can I do it?" I asked her desperately. This woman just looked at me and knew what I meant. She took my hands and led me to a lounge down the hall. Matt gave me a strange look before I left, but I couldn't deal with explanations right now. I gave him a strange look right back and shrugged my shoulders.

We sat down on the camel-colored couch and couldn't have been more than an inch apart.

"My name is Maggie." She told me with a cracked voice.

"I'm Julie." I answered back.

"Julie, please know that I am feeling your pain. I can't tell you when and how you are going to pull that plug, but this decision is really not a decision at all. This is something you have to do. This is not a choice. You know deep inside that you must let Chad go peacefully."

"I know that, but I can't let go!"

I couldn't believe how much sense this woman I just met was making. I hated her for being so brutally honest. The worst part about it, is she was right.

She got up and walked to the window and was silent. Here this lady was telling me what is best, and consoling me and her son's death must be tearing her in two. I rose from my seat and walked over to her.

"Maggie, I am so selfish."

"Why do you say that?" She asked me.

"Well, here I am burdening you with my problems, and not once did I ask you how you were doing." I gently held her hands in mine.

"I'm numb, but it's strange. I've accepted it already. It's not easy but it's fact. Danny is gone. Of course, he will never be forgotten." She said, keeping her eyes glued to mine.

"Oh, of course not! Danny and Chad were so close. Is it morbid to say it's best that they went together?" I asked her waiting for her answer.

"It's human Julie. We're human. We are going to be somewhere else for a while, but we're still human. We feel. We have loved these boys with all our hearts. There was nothing we could have done that we didn't already do." Maggie told me honestly.

My eyes widened at how well in tune this woman was with me. "Do you know something? I know that. I truly feel that I know I couldn't have stopped him from doing this tonight. He was seventeen years old. Not quite a child. We tried and he didn't let us. Do you know what is comforting? I know he knew Matt and I loved him despite everything he has done. That helps a lot, just knowing that." I smiled at her. Maggie smiled back at me through her tears and let, "I know too," escaped from her lips.

We gazed out the window a few minutes longer. We hugged and I didn't even have to tell her that I wanted to keep in touch with her, or to be friends. We knew. We had a bond now. Our children's death was going to bring us together.

I walked back into the hospital room and it was just Matt and our son in there. That familiar feeling came back where I didn't want to pull the plug. I was feeling weak again. Matt held my hand, then Chad's. We were silently saying a prayer. Matt knew that I had made up my mind. He looked at me and I knew prolonging this was killing us both. I broke the silence. "He was a good kid."

"Yeah, he was great. He was my first and only child. Sometimes he made me down-right proud." Matt joined in.

"Yeah." I answered him quickly. "We were a happy family. Even though he's given us some problems, he was a great son. He was ours, you know?"

My husband couldn't reply . . . He knew that we would never get a chance to say good-bye.

At least not while he was alive. He probably is trying to remember what our last words were to him. My heart felt so heavy. I felt sorrow for my grieving husband, my helpless son, and I was feeling sorry for myself. I didn't care, I deserved to. *How could I try to take my husband's pain away when I didn't even know how to ease mine?* I did the next best thing. I wrapped my arms around him and held him for a long time. Sorrow and despair were coming over me again. Matt released me and I noticed how tired and drawn he looked. He appeared to me, well beyond his forty years. I didn't want him to speak. I knew deep inside nothing he said was going to be good. I knew he was going to talk about Chad and the horrifying thought of peacefully ending his life. I was scared because I didn't know how to answer him. I knew what I had to say, and not what I wanted. This whole situation is relying on my response. I know Matt knows what we have to do. I don't want him to say it. It's too definite if it is spoken out loud.

"Honey, do you want to go home for awhile?"

Those weren't the words I was expecting and he took me by surprise. *How could we go home? What was he saying? We would go home and talk about a decision that was technically already made.*

What was that going to prove? Chad is still going to be lying there tomorrow and the next day and forever! I can't take another minute of this, let alone another day! Going home was totally out. I couldn't believe I was thinking that we must deal with this now.

"Matt, it's not going to get better. We need to let God take Chad now. We have to decide together." I blurted out.

"My decision is made. I just needed to be sure it's what you wanted too." He smoothed my hair, waiting for an answer.

"It's not what I want, Matt! It's what has already happened and we have to face it." I admitted, looking away from him.

"Then it is safe to say that it is settled then?" he asked cautiously.

"Matt!" I cried with alarm in my voice. "I'm scared and I'm so angry at God for taking our only son! I'm thirty-four years' old, and I'm childless, and I'll never have a grandchild! I was robbed of that special part of life." I immediately started to regret what I was saying, but I couldn't help it. Just as I was going to add something else, Matt agreed with me.

"I feel the same way! It's not fair. My son is supposed to outlive me. He was supposed to do my yard work when I'm too old."

He was pacing the small room, lowering his voice as if Chad could wake up from his coma-like state.

"I don't think I'll ever forgive myself." He hesitated, then knelt down next to Chad.

"There were many times when I wanted to tell you I loved you."

I could see he was now talking to Chad, and not me. I backed off to a wall and planted myself there.

"It seemed every time I turned around to tell you, the moment was lost because of stupid things you would do." Matt grabbed Chad's lifeless hand and held it to his mouth. "Son, you took a lot of wrong turns in life. I know I am not a perfect dad, but I want you to know you were my life. Every man longs to have a son. The first day I laid eyes on you in your mother's arms was the happiest day of my life."

By now my tears were uncontrollable. I found myself walking, almost floating, toward my husband and my son. I dropped to my knees opposite side of our son's bed and took Chad's other hand. I stayed very quiet. I wanted to listen to my husband's beautiful words for a long time.

Matt took a long deep breath before he spoke again. "I just wanted you to know. Regardless of all the arguments and everything I said, I love you, dammit. I care for you, son, and I am sorry."

By now he was crying and unable to control himself. Getting a grip on my own self, I started to speak to my son too.

"Chad, your father is right. You are the biggest part of our life." I stroked his hand with my thumb. "We are making this decision for you because we couldn't stand for you to just lie here in this bed." I wanted to add more, but the lump in my throat wouldn't let me. I laid my head on his arm and wept. I needed to say more. "I love you, Chad!" I cried out. "I don't care about all the cruel things you said or all the idiotic antics you pulled. I love you, Chad Anthony Jacobs!" I lowered my voice and took Matt's other hand. "We need to say good-bye to you now. We are a family and we always will be!" My head was pounding and my hands were trembling. I was really going to vomit. I stood up and ran to the small bathroom. I thought to myself how Chad's death was literally making me sick to my stomach. I was so weak I couldn't get off the floor. I forced myself up and washed my hands and face. I took a look in the mirror and realized how terrible and ghostly I appeared. I quickly walked back out to the hospital bed.

There it was. The same old scene. Matt, Chad, and the sick sound of his heart beat be-

ing monitored on that machine. Matt gazed up at me, questioning me with his eyes.

"I'm okay." I whispered.

We all held hands, and Matt and I recited the "Our Father."

"Also bless our son and keep him safe in heaven, Lord."

Listening to my husband recite this made me love him more than I ever did.

"Keep watch over Julie and myself. Please help the pain to subside over time. Help us to understand why you must take our son." He prayed.

I stood up and knelt down next to Matt. I took one last look at Chad. I was trying to memorize every last feature, as if I would forget. His big beautiful eyes that I could not see. His distinctive nose and cheek bones. I studied his strong build like his father's. My seventeen year old son was dying. This is the last time I would get to see him. I drank him in, all of him. I touched his head, his cheek, his arms and hands. I could see Matt was doing the same. We were just there kneeling, wondering, and hurting.

Matt stood up, walked away and pulled open the door. In a few minutes the relatives came in to say their good-byes. I didn't leave Chad's side at all through that.

Matt stood off to the side, staring out the window. He was running his fingers over the sill, lost in thought. The sun was just rising and now that it was spring, birds could be heard everywhere. It was so beautiful outside, yet in here it was a tragedy.

Now it was just two doctors, Matt, me, and of course, Chad. One of the doctors looked at us, waiting for our approval. I bent down and kissed my son's face numerous times. I hugged him as hard as his fragile body would allow. Matt stepped in closer and kissed Chad's forehead. He then kissed both his hands and said, "I love you son; you are the best. Good-bye, buddy." The tears were flowing freely from his eyes. I could barely handle it any more. I was now choking with sobs. Matt held me up and that nauseous feeling was coming over me again. *Oh no, hold it back. Now is not the time,* I thought. I fumbled through my purse for a piece of gum. I quickly unwrapped it and shoved it in my mouth. It settled my stomach for then.

We painfully looked at each other, then nodded at the doctors. I was sweating, and I thought I might faint any second. We watched in agony as the doctor went to release the life support. It took only three seconds, but it seemed longer, so much longer.

It was silent. The doctors gave us a loving pat on our arms and left. It was chilling. The machine had no more beeps. His chest no longer rose up and down. Looking at him, we were sure he was gone. He was lifeless. He was dead. We were frozen in our spots.

The sun was high in the sky. The birds were out in their entirety. The outside was a whole new beginning. Yet, inside was an ending. But was it? It could be a new beginning. It would have to be. Life goes on. We needed to get a grip and go on. Of course, we could grieve as long as we wanted. There was no rule for how long we could grieve.

"It's true what they say, you know." I piped in and took Matt's hands. He looked up taken by surprise.

"What's true?" He looked at me strangely.

"Time heals pain and all wounds." I said surprisingly cheerful. Matt stared at me and looked as if a weight had been lifted. Like he seemed happy I was not falling apart, like he expected.

"You're right, honey. Yes, it's true. We have each other. We can make it. This sudden death is too tragic to get over. I thought how I had to be strong for you. I now see it is possible to be strong together.

"Yes!" I shouted in a whisper. I couldn't believe it. I was talking with my husband like I wasn't sad. I was feeling guilty.

"Life goes on and I love you too much to lose you." I said.

"Lose me?" He asked while rolling his eyes.

"Well, I thought you wouldn't be able to handle me after Chad's death. I thought after so much of my grieving and depression you'd leave me." I told him sadly. "But now it is different, I realize you're grieving just as much as I am."

"We can help each other through this, Julie. Chad will be with us forever. In our hearts he will live on. I know it sounds corny, but it's true!" He said this with a dazzling smile.

"Oh, Matt, it's not corny! It's true! It's down right true!" I said, matching his smile.

Our first night at home without Chad was desolate. We left the door to his bedroom open. We figured if we closed the door, it would remain that way. I didn't feel as strongly about a new beginning as I felt just a few hours ago at the hospital. I wasn't strong any more. I was the grieving mother I expected to be.

Exhausted from too much thinking and talk, we fell asleep.

I awoke the next morning with the birds and the sun. Deja´ vu I thought to myself. I remembered right away why I was supposed to be sad. It came back too as I recalled my restless sleep. I looked over at Matt who was sleeping, unshaven and still in last night's clothes. I sat up to look at the clock. There was that feeling again. I was sick. I ran to the bathroom clutching my stomach. I made it to the toilet. Just as I was washing my hands and face, Matt came in.

"What's wrong, sick again?" He asked groggily.

"Yeah, I don't know it must be the stress and all that strong coffee and stuff."

"Don't forget that piece of gum, too; that could have done it." He said sarcastically. I smiled and was feeling better.

"Want to go out for breakfast and you know, talk?" He asked me. I knew what he meant. Funeral arrangements needed to be made. I walked passed him and started the shower. He took that as a yes. Matt started down the hall but not before I ran back to the toilet to vomit again. Matt stood by the bathroom door and leaned on the door frame on one shoulder. I looked up at him and to my surprise, he was smiling down at me.

"I hardly think this is the time for making jokes, Matt!" I spat out, embarrassed. I got up shakily and was getting a drink of water. I could see him still out of the corner of my eye. He still had that stupid smirk on his face.

"What!" I finally yelled at him. "What is so damn funny?" He came over to the sink behind me and wrapped his arms around my middle and we both stood there, looking in the mirror.

"Julie, I think before breakfast we need to make a stop at the hospital." He told me matter of factly.

"Honey, I think Chad's been moved already."

Matt interrupted me. "Not that. We need to go see a doctor for you, and get a certain little test that you took over sixteen years ago."

My happiness could not be contained. It showed all over my face. It was true. Matt was right! I very well could be.

"Oh, Matt, do you really think? Could it be? What am I asking you for? Of course, it's true!" I shouted happily.

"Oh, Julie!" Matt said brightly. "Don't you see? Don't you understand? This new life is Chad all over again! The birds, the sun, the new beginning. It's a sign. A good sign."

"A new beginning . . . " I said trailing off with my own thoughts. I threw my arms around him and silently thanked God. I cried sad tears for Chad. I also cried happy tears for our new beginning. I gazed out the window over Matt's shoulder, and the sun was shining brightly. The birds were singing of happiness. A new beginning indeed.

Writer's Block

JeNeen Maselskis

I was traveling home with my husband and three children. I had just left the hospital where I had been for the last three months. Four months ago, I was diagnosed with brain cancer. My family was taking me home to die. My life, the last forty-two years of it, was literally passing before my eyes.

After Dale and I had our last child, Drew, we knew our lives were complete. We had all that we ever wanted. My husband was very secure in his job. In fact, we were very happy in every aspect of our life! I was very fortunate to stay home and raise my children. When Drew was in school full time, I worked part time as a receptionist for an insurance office.

Toward late afternoon one day at work, I felt very faint. I went to the ladies room and splashed cold water on my face. I gazed in the mirror that was hanging above the sink. I thought I was either pregnant or just weak because I skipped lunch. I knew it was only possible it was the latter. Five minutes later, I was at my desk and back to work. I shrugged my weak spell off for the rest of the afternoon.

I arrived home at four-thirty and started dinner. Dale, Drew and my other two children, James and Paula, ages twenty and seventeen, were all seated to eat. Cheesy augratin potatoes, garlic-basted chicken, green beans with bacon bits, topped with melted butter, and a fresh leafy green salad; none of those stirred up my appetite. I simply was not hungry. Dale noticed how I nudged my food around on my plate.

"Hannah, why aren't you eating?"

"I had a big lunch." I lied.

"Oh, yeah? What did you have?" he asked.

"Uh, a burrito." I stammered, not meaning to.

I guess my answer satisfied him, because the subject was switched to James' second year of college in the fall.

"Only two and a half more months away James, so you better have all the fun now before you go back!" Paula teased.

"Hey! It's better than lame high school!" he teased back.

"I'm going to load the dishwasher." I said, and left my family to finish eating. After dinner, Paula and I cleaned the kitchen. Dale and I then retired to the family room to read and watch TV. I lay my newspaper aside because I kept nodding off.

"Did you read the section on homes? They're building up like crazy!" Dale asked, jolting me out of my sleep.

"Yea, I did read that." I answered.

" What's wrong? Were you sleeping?"

"No, not really." I yawned. I started to massage my temples. That was the fourth migraine that week! I thought to myself.

"Headache?" Dale asked.

"Dale, don't worry about it! Just concentrate on your reading!" I snapped.

I immediately regretted what I said, but I knew I wasn't feeling right the past couple of weeks, and I didn't need him harping on the fact. I went upstairs without saying a word and fell into bed.

The next morning I woke at ten! I never slept past eight! I noticed I was still in my clothes from the night before, and oddly, I felt as if I hadn't gotten enough sleep.

I instantly sat up and swung my legs to the side of the bed. Throbbing pain from my temples again! I was very frightened. I knew there had to be something wrong with me. Given my past history, I've always been so healthy! That is why I needed to go see a doctor. I made an appointment for that late afternoon. I was the only one at home, so I left a note for Dale and told him I'd return before dinner and was going to do a little grocery shopping. I didn't want him to know anything about the doctor's appointment.

My hands were clammy and slightly discolored while I sat in the waiting lounge. Four-thirty, I should be called any moment. Four-thirty-five, Damn! C'mon, I thought, I needed to be home before anyone.

"Hannah Voss?" a sweet voice sang out.

"Yes." I croaked and I stood up.

The doctor examined me and I told him of all my symptoms. I had great eyesight and hadn't changed any pattern of caffeine, so that was ruled out. The doctor ordered up some tests and one included an MRI!

"Why do I need that?" I cried.

"We must do that to rule out any possibilities, Mrs. Voss. The MRI needs to be scheduled a different day. The results of the blood tests you took today will be back in a few days. We'll call you." The doctor said.

I had so many concerns invading my mind. The most prominent one was, how would I keep this from my family? I couldn't, I actually didn't want to. I needed their support. I numbly drove home, and I could tell by all the cars in the driveway that everyone was already home. I was shaking as I walked into the house. They were obviously waiting for me to bring in dinner. I strolled down the hallway that led to the kitchen.

"Here she is!" Dale called out.

The kids ran from every which way, ending up in the kitchen. All one of them had to ask was'where's dinner', and I would break. I broke in before they could.

"Um...uh,...Dinner is coming up! I...didn't find anything in the store to eat...well, I remembered the frozen pork chops we have in the freezer...and that will do, right? So, it will be ready in...a half hour!"

"Half hour! I'm starving!" My youngest cried out.

"Drew!" I started shaking him by the shoulders. "You are so selfish! You can't wait a damn half hour? You won't wither away! Have a banana to curb your appetite!"

My family was speechless. I released Drew and dropped to my knees to embrace him. I cried my heart out on my eleven year old son's shoulder.

"Hannah, what the hell is it?" My husband yelled.

"Tell us, Mom!" Paula cried.

I explained the last couple of weeks and the doctor appointment. Of course, my family was totally understanding, in an undertone way. I

wondered how I ever felt that I couldn't share that with them. Dale made the MRI appointment immediately. We were scheduled the next morning. We ordered a pizza and had a very gloomy night.

The following day, the blood test results were in. They were all normal. I breathed a sigh of relief. I only had one more day of agony for the results of the MRI. I spent that day just thinking over in my head how that test better come out normal. The next morning the results were in. I sat in my doctor's office and he informed Dale and me that I had a brain tumor, and it was aggressive. My doctor was somber when he related the news to us. My face crumpled like a paper bag and I wept.

"What now?" Dale asked the doctor.

"Brain surgery is not an option. That would do more harm than good." he answered.

"What?" I cried. "I don't get it! What...Will I ever get better?"

"We will start with powerful chemotherapy to try and shrink the tumor, Mrs. Voss, I must be honest with you. It may only shrink a little or none at all."

I didn't even face any wrenching choices. Surgery wasn't an option. Chemotherapy would probably not work, and leaving the tumor alone was out also. My option was dying. I was going to die. I felt weak then I faded out and collapsed. I woke up in a hospital room with a pounding headache.

"Hannah, look guys, she's up." I heard Dale saying.

"Mom..." my three kids whispered.

Everyone was crying. Oh shit, oh God, it's real. I am going to die. "No, No!" I moaned. I didn't give a shit about anyone knowing I didn't feel strong. I was dying and it was over for me. Over! I was miserable and everyone was going to know!

"Mom, don't give up! There's a chance the chemo may work." Paula said.

"No, honey. That's just something they have to try. It won't work!" I complained. "I want to be alone, please-I need some sleep."

I was left alone in a room that had no feelings in it. *How did this happen? Why did this have to be cancer that wasn't curable?* I was jealous and bitter toward the people in this world that had cancer and fought the disease. *How come they survived? I didn't even have a fighting chance.* I could not contain my depressing thoughts! *I, Hannah Voss, was going to die! My life, my home, my family.* "No, no! Help me! Help me!" I shouted as thunderous as my lungs could lurch out. Two nurses and my family came rushing in. I felt a slight pinch in my arm, and the next moment I drifted into deep slumber. Like dying in my sleep, I thought.

The next day I underwent my first treatment of chemotherapy. I vomited all day and constantly sweated. I also had chills and felt so weak, I thought my body would surely shut itself down. I slept through to the next morning. I awoke feeling weak but better than the day before.

Six weeks had passed and I had lost thirty pounds and most of my hair. All the time alone gave me the ability to really think. I thought of how my kids were at home eating dinner every night without me. Drew, who helped him with his homework? Paula is going to graduate next year. I'll never see that happen. Tears rolled down my cheeks. Will Dale date again? I was angry! I did not want any other woman raising my children! Who is doing the laundry? I don't want all those responsibilities on Paula's shoulders. She has a life too. This was not fair!

Day by dreary day, was spent in that miserable boring room. My complexion was ghostly white. My hair, which used to be long, red and wavy, resembled a head with spikes protruding out. I had no strength. I was dying . . . I needed my mom just then. I missed her terribly. I wept and acted like a spoiled kid. I didn't know how my family put up with me. I had chemotherapy twice a week for five weeks. The doctor told us the treatment had not shrunk the tumor at all.

"Maybe a couple more treatments will do it." Dale said with hope.

"Our insurance must be running out, Dale." I whispered groggily.

"Do you honestly think I give a damn? Your life is more important. I'd give up the house for this treatment for you!" he said.

"I'm afraid any more amounts of chemotherapy would make Hannah weaker." the doctor said.

"Who gives a shit!" Dale yelled. "If it makes her better, then so be it!"

"Mr. Voss, your wife has very little time to live, four months maximum." His voice then softened a little. "Now, you need to decide if Hannah would like to live here or at home with you and your children."

We had no choice again. This whole cancer monster was taking over. It dominated every circumstance in our life. How I lived, (or died) and how Dale and the kids lived. The monster was making our decisions for us. The bastard was literally controlling our lives.

I wanted to go home, but I needed care around the clock. The nurses needed to bathe me and give me pain medication. I needed to be fed through a tube because I wasn't able to keep any food down. I knew our insurance would certainly run out if we had a nurse at home.

Within four weeks the tumor was really monopolizing my body. I was paralyzed, and one day, woke up and could not speak. I lost all mastery to talk and walk and was even losing control of my bladder. My family would visit and I couldn't even have a conversation with them. I had to write to them on paper, or when I was feeling weak, blink my eyes for yes and no answers. Drew would get directly in front of my face and shout, "Mommy, what's wrong? Please talk to me. Mom, please!" He would cry, then I would cry. I was a blubbering idiot. The only advantage I had left was my mind, even though I wished it was numb like my limbs. I was a damn useless corpse lying there.

A decision needed to be made. Dale addressed issues over with me. To sum it all up, he discussed my death. Hot tears rolled down my face and dropped to my hands. I watched my agonized husband wipe them away.

"Hannah, what should we do?" Dale questioned me. "Do you want to go home?" I blinked twice for yes. I gave him a baffled look.

"What Hannah? Wait, um, let's see," he pondered. "Write it honey, try." I wouldn't do it. "Okay, do you want to go home?" I blinked twice again. "And you want a nurse and the works?" I interrupted him and shook my head violently. How could we afford nurses? I thought.

"Oh, okay, sorry, sorry! Okay, you don't want the nurses?" he asked. I blinked once.

"What are you telling me Hannah! Please you are scaring me. What! Write it!" He shoved the pad and pen toward me. I wanted to shout out at him that I was ready to die! I wish I could give him a good-bye speech on how greatly I love him and what to do and how to live after I was gone. I couldn't! I could not say a word. I was not strong enough to write either, I was too weak. My pain was supervised with mor-

phine, and the cancer was invading my body and well-being. There was no cure and I was only going one way. I finally started to gather strength to write it down. I wanted to die, I wanted to tell Dale. I didn't have to. He gently took the pen and pad of paper from me. After all our years of marriage he could see it in my eyes, as the saying goes.

Paula and James walked in and knew something was wrong.

"What is it, Dad?" James asked. "What? Come on, Dad, what gives?"

"Kids, your mother just told me that she would like to come home."

"Well, that's great!" Paula said smiling.

"Yeah, then we'll get to spend . . . her last moments with us, together . . . as a family." Dale wept. I had uncontrollable sobs because I felt sorry for Dale.

"Mom! Are you crazy?" Paula said, "You don't want to die! You'll get better!" I squeezed my eyes shut tightly. NO, NO, NO . . . I blinked.

"When is this going to happen?" James asked puzzled.

"Well," Dale hesitated, and looked into my eyes, "We'll bring Mom home and we'll set her up in our room." He shifted himself on the edge of my bed, and I watched him grasp my hands in his. "I think we can ask the doctor." The kids faces had frightened expressions. Their father was informing them that he was bringing home their mother so she could die. The kids kissed me and numbly left.

"We'll have this all straightened out in the morning, Han." Dale said.

Han, he called me that nickname ever since the beginning of our relationship. It's so sad that I'll only hear that name just for a little while longer.

"Hey, stop crying. We'll be fine." Dale tried consoling me. He kissed my forehead and left.

I spent the remainder of the night tossing and turning, in my head only.

The morning reluctantly greeted me with rain and thunder. It matched my mood and that suited me just fine. It didn't bother me if I never seen the sun shine again.

"Good morning, Mrs. Voss." A chipper, slightly overweight nurse said. Her name was Kelly. She was my nurse on and off for the past three months or so. Who knows. I lost track of time. I didn't bother to take my eyes away from the ugly view outside.

"I hear you're going home today." That grabbed my attention. I looked at her for more information. "Maybe I should let the doctor give you all the details, honey." she said, because my look must have cautioned her. I grunted for her to tell me more. I grabbed the paper and wrote: "Tell me more!"

"Well, sweetie, I don't know all the facts, but the doctor has signed your release papers. Today is the day." she grinned. Was she smiling because I was going home, or going home to peacefully die?

Dale came in with my doctor. Nurse Kelly was right. The doctor had released me. We agreed there would be morphine for me as long as I needed it. The treatments of chemotherapy were terminated. I let the fate of my life lie in my husband's hands as he signed the papers. Twelve forty-five p.m., I was finally going home. I couldn't wait to get in familiar surroundings. Dale and the kids anxiously watched as the nurses helped guide me in a wheel chair. I was a typical handicap. My head and neck needed to be supported. I was embarrassed. I felt like big zero in my family's eyes. I wept and realized that this was not going to be a happy ending.

"Ready, Han?" Dale asked. I blinked twice.

"Oh, wait! Mrs. Voss, your paper and stuff."

Kelly said. She gave me my writing material that I had been doodling with the past four months. I smiled at her and when she knelt down to hug me, I let my tears flow again. "You take care of yourself, Mrs. Voss, and I'm praying for you." she said as she held back her own tears. I gave her a weak smile and as quickly as I could, wrote thank you and God bless. Kelly read it and put it in her breast pocket, and allowed the other nurse to wheel me out. The hallway was never ending. My doctor lay his hand upon my shoulder as we approached the doors to our exit.

"Take care, Hannah." I knew he really meant good-bye. I wrote thank you and God bless to him also. He read it and looked down at me, and replied, "You too." Dale shook the doctor's hand, then helped me in the car. The kids held the car door open, and managed to get me into the front seat. The kids piled in the back. A car . . . I hadn't ridden in one for so long. The ride home had me watching my life pass before my eyes. My childhood, my deceased parents, my first job and my first date. Marriage, honeymoon, childbirth, birthdays, holidays, my wedding dress, my clothes, the kid's clothes . . . Dale glanced over at me. I was crying and had every right. He reached over and placed his hand on mine. It felt so right. Then why did this happen to me? Why was it all so wrong? The windshield wipers were going back and forth. I will never see them again. I studied them and got lost. They managed to clear the window swish . . . swish . . . swish.

Dale's right turn signal was on and we pulled into the driveway. On the garage door, was a banner that said: WELCOME HOME MOM! Neighbors were all around waving and smiling. I felt flustered. I didn't want them viewing Dale carrying me in the house. He knew. He pulled in the garage and quickly closed the door behind us. The kids piled out of the car and Dale helped me out. He carried me through the house up to the bedroom. The house smelled great. I was proud of my family. It was a blend of lilac and apple spice that filled the house. The house was so clean and neat. I felt content for once. Dale gently placed me on our bed. On my nightstand was a pile of cards addressed to me. They lay next to a beautiful bouquet of flowers, that boasted of pink and yellow carnations. On the television, were more flowers. There were balloons and banners all for me. I wrote them and told them thanks and I loved them all and they were truly the best! I handed Dale the note and he passed it to the rest of the family. Drew was last and he jumped on the bed and hugged me. He cuddled next to me for a very long time. We watched a movie that Dale had rented. I woke up to Dale turning off the TV. Drew was still next to me. Dale crawled in beside Drew and pulled in closer to me. I only wished I could have made love to my husband one last time. I cried myself to sleep. I woke up about an hour later in great pain. I grunted and Dale switched on the light. He immediately administered the morphine in my IV like he was instructed. It instantly took effect, and I slept until noon the next day.

"Hi, sleepy head!" he said. I smiled and felt my eyes sparkle at him.

"Hi, Mom!" All three kids gathered in and eagerly notified me of anything that came to their minds. I loved them. They were my life, and I was going to abandon them. They were my center of everything! I thought like that all the time! I wrote them endless notes telling them of that. I was grateful to have understanding and unselfish children, not to mention, Dale! I prepared them for my death. I told Paula to take care and guide Drew. I knew her father would do a wonderful job. I was thankful that

at least this happened when he was older and not three or four years old.

I felt tired the majority of all my days. It appeared I slept all day and night. The kids took turns lying next to me. We watched TV or just did nothing. It was getting difficult to breathe. I knew my days were numbered. Dale lay next to me and this particular night, I felt extremely weak. Dale lay his hand over mine, and I seized his hand as tightly as my strength would permit. He gave me a look and asked if I needed more morphine. I nodded and he gave me some. I thought how blessed I was to have a devoted husband who always visited me at the hospital, and is taking over to change my bed pans, and administering drugs. I grabbed my pen and paper and painfully wrote:

Dale,

I love you. You are the most caring and understanding man in the whole world! Please go on with your life when I am gone. You deserve a good woman. I love you - I can't even describe how much - it would be impossible! Please forgive my disease and know you and the kids are like precious gems in my life. I'll miss you.

Hannah

I handed it to him when it was complete. He read it and hugged me and cried.

"Hannah, you can't help your disease. It's not your fault, I love you and will forever miss you. I know you are dying. I am facing that repulsive fact. What I want is to treasure you alive while I can." I blinked twice and sleep took over.

I never felt as grave as I did that next day. I pleaded for more medication. Dale gave me some, and we planned to spend the whole day outside in our backyard. I was in a wheel chair surrounded by my family. I had no energy to even smile. Shortly later, Dale carried me back inside. I did not have the fervor to even hold a pen. I am always tired. I am very tired.

My mother, Hannah Voss, could not find the strength to finish her writing. I, Paula Voss, will conclude it for her.

My mom passed away two long days after she wrote her last paragraph. She was going to die soon, and we all were aware of it. The last two days of her life, we spent lying beside her. We held her, kissed her and talked to her. Many relatives and friends came to say their goodbyes. It broke my heart to watch my mother struggle to keep up pleasant spirits. We said good-bye to her every night just in case she passed in her sleep. The inevitable happened on the second night. My dad woke the next morning to discover mom lying in bed dead. It was actually a relief. It's a morbid statement, but when you know first hand what she's been through, the words are fitting. Even though we never, ever wanted her to die, we knew suffering was not fair either. Dad, James, Drew and I, will do everything we can to stick together as a family. I'm going to try to help my dad guide Drew with all my mom's insights that were instilled in me.

"God bless you, Mom, and please watch over us, for it was you that made us the wonderful human beings we are today. I am still trying to forgive God for taking you away. It's very difficult. I will try to take the energy from my anger and place it positively toward holding our family together. I will try, Mom. We love you, we miss you, and most of all we feel you are irreplaceable! You left a great impression on this earth while you were here. The family will not let anyone forget that. I'm putting down your pen now, Mom, until I write again - bye, Mom . . ."

Paula Voss

Chapter One

April McDonnell

He found himself running down an alley when he came to. *Where am I?* He thought to himself. He looked down at his clothing which was torn and drenched with sweat. *Who am I running from?*

"Hey!" A distant voice howled.

He didn't recognize the voice, but the tone wasn't reassuring. He was obviously caught doing something he shouldn't have been doing. Now if he only knew what he had done. As he reached a busy street he slowed down. It was night out and he figured it was probably late, judging by the scenery of the streets.

"Hey, baby, wanna go party?" The woman wore a you're-in-for-it type smile. She wore tight clothes that hid nothing about her body.

"What's a matter, Joey?" She looked confused. "You don't like me today? Is that it?" His name wasn't Joey. He wondered what this whore was doing calling him Joey.

He started running away from the prostitute. A few more of them tried to lure him in, also, but he kept going. He didn't know where he was, but he knew he had to find the police. *The police? Am I nuts?* The police were probably the ones that were after him. He looked at the street sign. 67th and Ridgeway St. He glanced toward the street in hopes of spotting a taxi. No luck. He kept walking.

He reached into his pockets and pulled out a wad of cash. *Just wonderful,* he thought, I *robbed a store. Now I'm probably going to have a warrant out for my arrest. My whole life is doomed now.* He saw something yellow in the corner of his eye and was temporarily relieved to see it was a taxi. He began furiously waving his hands. The cab pulled over and he got in.

"Where to?" The taxi driver had a thick accent. He couldn't figure out what kind of accent it was.

"420 Chestnut Drive." The driver gave him a weird look as he said it. He noticed the driver glance back at him every few minutes during the drive. The trip to Chestnut Drive took about 40 minutes. The driver probably could sense something was wrong, especially by his appearance. He was dressed in all black and his face looked like it hadn't been shaved in days.

He paid the driver the fare and a handsome tip when they reached their destination. The driver mumbled something, but he couldn't hear it. He didn't care. All he cared about was that he was finally home. He felt like he hadn't been here in years.

As he approached the door he started to feel for his key. He started to panic until he felt it in the very bottom of his pocket. He took it out and tried to unlock the door, but it would not fit. He groaned with impatience. Then he thought of the window that he always kept unlocked, just in case of these situations.

The house was a ranch style, so the window was very easy to get into. He went in through the window on the side of his house, conscious of nosy neighbors. He pulled the maneuver off like a pro, which actually made him nervous. How often did he climb through his window to get access into his own home?

He felt for his bed, which was right next to the window. When he was successfully in the house, with the window shut, a light snapped on.

"Where have you been?" The question was sharp, but he didn't sense a bit of worrying in the voice. It was his mother.

"Can we please talk about this tomorrow? I am so tired, mother." He pleaded with her. What

was he supposed to tell her anyway? *Sorry, Mom, I don't even know where I've been.*

"Oh, no. No more talking. Tomorrow you are out of here. You hear me, boy? First thing in the morning you are packing your bags and leaving. So, if I were you . . ."

"Okay, Mother. Fine, whatever." He had to shut the door on her face. Was the old nag going to go on forever? He didn't need this after the night he'd been through. Especially with this amazing headache brewing.

He thought of other things as he lay down. For instance, what was he going to do when the police came to take him away? His life was over, as far as he was concerned. He was going to rot in jail for the rest of his life. His thoughts began to fade away as he drifted into sleep.

"Wanna party, Joey?" Her face was close to his. She was just about to kiss him, and then she was pulled backwards.

"Don't play with me, Joe. This ain't no game. You're in this and you can't get out, ya hear me, boy?" He felt the man jabbing something in his back. He turned around and saw a gun.

"Andrew, get up. Get up, man!" He jumped into reality, as if the dream door slammed shut.

His brother was poking him with his finger. What a nightmare he had. That whore was in his dreams.

"How was your night?" His brother, Alan, asked him sarcastically. "You know mother's really pissed off, don't you? She was up all night worrying. You must have had some night."

"No, Alan, it was horrible." The part of it he remembered was definitely lousy. Andrew had a pretty good feeling that the rest of the night was even worse.

"Wow, where'd you get all this dough?" Alan was his younger brother, but only by two years. Alan was 17 and Andrew was 19. "Looks like you robbed a bank." He started to laugh, but Andrew didn't think the joke was very funny. Hell, it might have been a bank he robbed for all he knew.

"I've been saving up." Andrew replied.

"Yeah, right. Emily called you last night. She sounded really anxious on the phone. Did she get a hold of you?"

"No. Do you have any aspirin?" He wanted to avoid any conversation at all about the night before.

"No. Better than that." Alan showed Andrew the joint. "What do you say, partner? Want to live on the edge?" Alan challenged Andrew with a daring smile.

"C'mon, Alan. Not now. Mom wants to kick me out. You know you should be careful with that around her." Andrew felt tired and strung out. Right now, he just wanted to get some things straight in his mind. He began to feel like he was losing it.

"Well, I'll see you later. I'm going over to Mikey's." Alan seemed disappointed for a second, but left with enthusiasm.

Andrew found his cigarettes and was just about to light one when the phone rang.

"Hullo?" He answered groggily.

"Andrew! Where were you last night? I was so worried about you. Is everything okay?" Emily's voice sounded good to hear until he remembered what happened with her. He had caught her with a guy at her house when he showed up without an invitation to her party. He'd had his suspicions about her cheating for a couple of weeks before he caught her red handed.

"No, everything's not okay. I caught my girlfriend cheating on me last night with some

dope. I'm actually really angry right now with you." he said, accusingly.

"Can we please talk about this? C'mon, Andy, come over to my house. I can explain everything. Just give me a chance." He voice pleaded with him. He wanted to go over there, but he knew he would just end up giving in to her. He needed some time away from her to straighten out his priorities.

"No. I have to go. I have more important things to worry about." He hung up the phone. If he listened to her any more it would remind him of her sweet face with those luscious lips. If he talked to her any time soon, his feelings would turn to mush.

The phone rang again.

"Listen, Emily, it's over. Don't call . . ." He was suddenly cut off by someone.

"Listen, Joey it's not over 'til I say it's over. I want my money. You better be here tonight. If you don't get your ass over her by eleven o'clock I'm going to . . ." Andrew hung up. Now he knew he was in trouble. He didn't want to hear what the man was going to do to him. His voice was intimidating enough.

Andrew went to check the caller I.D., but the caller was calling from an unavailable number. He still couldn't understand why they called him "Joe." Worst of all, he didn't understand how they could have got his number, especially if they didn't know his real name.

He jumped as he heard the car horn go off outside his window. *Oh no, it's all over now. It's not even the police, it's worse. It's the mob!* He peeked out his window to see his friend, Bill, waving for Andrew to come outside. He silently thanked God that he still had a chance at living.

He ran into his mother on the way out of his house to meet Bill.

"I hope you have you're things ready to go," she said sternly.

"I'll be home in a couple of hours." he replied, disregarding her comment. He grabbed the house key on the way out.

"Rough night?" Bill asked as Andrew got in his car. It was a cold day and Andrew was glad that Bill's car was heated up.

"Piss off! I could have killed that jerk with Emily. Bastard!" Andrew's adrenaline started pumping faster just thinking about it. He could still see it so perfectly. Jerry Smith, the hick of the town, was all over Emily. In fact, Andrew was about to cheer the old bastard on until he saw it was his girlfriend Jerry was fondling so passionately.

"What about Emily? Don't you think she should take some of the blame also? Forget her, man. You could get any chic you want. I don't see why you want her anyway." Bill tried to console Andrew. He knew that feeling of being cheated only too well.

"Yeah, you're right," Andrew agreed. *But that smile of hers just steals my heart.*

"Well, what did you do after you stormed out of the party?" Bill asked, wanting to change the subject.

"Got into trouble, what else?" Bill chuckled. Andrew had a weird feeling he shouldn't trust anyone with the situation at hand. He glanced at the mirror on his door. He saw a couple of cars behind them, but no one suspicious looking. He was glad that at least they weren't following him.

Bill pulled into the college parking lot.

"I have to grab a couple of books. Care to join me?" Bill asked Andrew.

"No. Go ahead, if you're coming right back." Andrew said.

Bill left the keys in the ignition so Andrew could listen to some music. He turned to his

favorite radio station. He was immediately sorry he did because Emily's song was on. He smiled to himself as he imagined her singing it. God, she had a beautiful voice and a beautiful face and everything else was beautiful, too. He missed her already and they hadn't even broken up for a whole 24 hours.

A loud squealing of tires, then a crash yanked him out of his fantasy. He jumped out of the car to see what was going on. About two lanes over was a crowd of people. He ran toward them. He noticed a red car just like Emily's involved in a two car accident. The other vehicle involved was a truck. He saw a little bit of damage to the front of the truck. He heard gasps and moans coming from the crowd. His stomach turned over when he read the license plate on the red car. It was Emily. He forced his way through the crowd as fast as he could. *Oh God, no, not Emily. Please God, no!* The front of her little, red car was crumpled up on the windshield. There was shattered glass everywhere within ten feet of the car. He ran to get closer, but someone pulled him back. It was a cop.

"No! Let me go! I need to see her! I need to see if she's okay." Andrew was trying to fight the cop off and look at Emily at the same time. All he could see was a mass of her bright, blonde hair hanging over the steering wheel.

The ambulances came speeding up. Andrew looked over and saw a cop talking to a man with a stretcher by the truck. The driver of the truck was obviously still alive and well. Andrew ran to get closer to the man.

" . . . she just pulled out in front of me, ociffers, I mean, officers. There was nothing I could do," the man stumbled over his words. He was obviously intoxicated. Andrew ran up to him with fury his eyes. The cops stopped Andrew from attacking the drunk man.

"You killed her! You killed Emily! You'll pay for this! You'll . . ." Andrew couldn't scream anymore because he was already choking on his tears.

"Simmer down, son. Let the law handle this. Don't worry, we'll take care of this." The cop tried to soothe him, but Andrew didn't hear him. The only thing he heard was the echoes of a car crash screaming in his head.

"Andrew . . ." It was Bill. Andrew put his arms around him. Bill didn't know what to say. What do you say to someone when something like this happens? Suddenly Bill felt bad about all those things he said about Emily to Andrew. God, Andrew must hate me now.

Bill felt awkward to have Andrew crying on his shoulder, but he only held him tighter. Bill led the way back to his car and placed Andrew in the passenger seat. Bill got in the other side of the car.

"Got a lighter, man?" Andrew asked, his face was still red and his eyes were swollen, but he had stopped crying.

"Sure." Bill couldn't get over the wild mood swing; though Andrew still seemed depressed.

Andrew lit his cigarette and took a deep drag from it. Bill had a cigarette also, under the circumstances. Bill usually didn't smoke.

"Man, that sucks. She was a great lay," said Andrew, sighing.

"What?" Bill hoped Andrew hadn't said what he'd just heard.

"Never mind," Andrew said, flinging his cigarette out the window.

Bill put his car in drive and took off. He didn't know what else to do but drop Andrew off at home. He pulled up by Andrew's house.

"Take me to the subway," Andrew demanded.

"Why? Where are you going?" Bill didn't want Andrew wandering around all depressed.

"I just need to take care of a few things," Andrew replied.

Bill was reluctant, but it was the only thing he could do for Andrew.

"Do you need me to pick you up?" Bill asked Andrew when they arrived at the subway.

"No." The door shut in Bill's face.

Joey knew where he was going. He had to get this out of the way. Luther was going to have a reward out for Joey's head if he didn't give him his money soon.

The cold air stung Joey's face when he got off the subway. He felt in his pocket for the third time to make sure he still had his money. Bums made their living off of pick-pocketing people out here. Joey always carried a knife with him, especially when going to see Luther. That low-life liked to threaten everyone. God, Joey hated him, but he was good to do business with. He was damn good. He definitely had the smarts to do business. All these years and the old bastard still hadn't been caught once. Joey smirked to himself. How fortunate of him to meet a guy like Luther. Many ordinary guys like Joey don't get a chance like that in their whole lives.

After hopping a few buses, he finally reached his destination, Luther's crib.

He pounded on Luther's door three times.

"Who's there?" Ditto, Luther's sidekick, called out.

"It's Joe, Let me in."

"Joey, how ya doin'?" Ditto opened the door.

"Fine. Is Luther 'round, cause I gotta talk to him," Joey closed and locked the door behind him.

"You better gots my money, ya little prick," Luther's voice came from the shadows. "Come to the back room. We got some business to discuss."

Ditto followed Joey and Luther to the back room. A light was switched on, though it was still dim in room.

Ditto pushed a gun in Joey's back.

"You got my money, Joe?" Luther asked, trying to sound menacing.

"Back off, Ditto. Yeah, I gots your money, Luther. You got a job for me? I wanna bigger cut this time," Joey didn't sound the least bit afraid of Luther. Ditto removed the gun.

"Sorry, Joey, just a little misunderstanding," Ditto apologized to Joey.

"You know, Joey, you aren't very reliable. Sometimes I gots to remind you of what your jobs are. Sometimes I gots ta put a little fear into you," Luther said to Joey.

Joey threw Luther's money out on the table.

"Good boy, Joey," Luther was pleased.

"Yeah, yeah. Ya got any uppers? I feel kinda tired," Joey casually inquired.

"I got something' special for you tonight. It'll go great with your job," Luther's smile was wicked, but it was always wicked.

Luther handed Joey a little pink pill. Joey never knew what is was and Luther never told him. But Joey always had a better time being successful with his job when he was on drugs. They made him feel invincible. Joey took a swig from a beer bottle to wash down the pill. Then they talked about the job.

"High Opinions"
Shawn McNeal

Psychedelic state
    of twisted fender logic
leaves me standing
    bleeding insane
crying through laughter of
    internal pain
Falling from glory
    on an endless track
lamp-post lure
    calls me back
Foot-rest philosophy
    kicks me when I'm down
reversible sweater
    never could turn around

Stinted
Shawn McNeal

All in all it was a nice coat

Fashionable I recall

To ease winter's suffering
with some regret
I from it did part
for the sake of a homeless man

Jacket I bestowed

A month went by
the wrap forgotten
until that unseasonably
numbing night
forlorn man
bloodless body found
gift spirited away

Jacket I bestowed

For the sake of a homeless man
I from it did part
with some regret
to ease winter's suffering

Fashionable I recall
All in all it was a nice coat

"Switchman's Noose"
Shawn McNeal

Pick up the pace
    on your lonely track
Switchman's noose
    never has given slack
great rail-car graveyards
    loom over your path
rusted ties and broken lines
    channel their wrath
foreboding shadows
    the chasm's you breach
Switchman's noose
    never really far from reach

Visions of Violence

Shawn McNeal

Demons of late,
Devils knocking
on my back door.
Dare I let him in?
Help me father
for I have sin.
Witness to a gruesome killing,
hangman's noose
stole a soul,
unwilling.
Now the reapers come
to collect his due.
I'm not ready to die
What else can I do?
No matter how far
I may run,
I always end up
where I started from.
Left alone
to face my fears,
I cower in darkness,
drowning in tears.
Creature in my head,
monster
hiding
under my bed.
Ferocious tiger gnaws
my brain as I scream
I wake to find
only a vile dream.
Sitting up
I tremble
in fright.
Realization
dawns on me,
I've survived
another night.

Untitled

Eric Moniger

Here are my caps that I wear quite oft.
This one is for thinking. I use it almost
    everyday, mostly when the teacher
    says to.
I also have a philosopher cap.
    It's for philosophying.
Socrates, Plato, Aristotle too.
Unexamined lives, integrity of mind,
    reason coming of age.
These old guys had some good ideas.
This is my science cap. I need it
    to do calculations and the like.
The theory of relativity; interesting concept.
Darwin. Evolution. We evolved from apes,
    you know.
This is my religion cap.
    I usually wear this one on Sundays.
Did you know God created the universe?
And this is my poet's cap.
    I need it to be poetic.
Here's something I wrote:
"The white flower was like a girl
    in her Sunday dress,
moist and humid, quite like the temple
    which lies open, welcoming the
    passers-by."
That sure sounds good!
These are only some of the caps I have.
I make sure not to get them mixed up.
That leads to trouble.
Once I wore my thinking cap
    when I was supposed to be wearing my
    religion cap.
I wasn't supposed to be thinking.
It scared people.
I also knew this guy
    who wore no caps at all.

He didn't believe in them.
I heard he had to go away.
Sometimes I wonder why we need the caps.
I'm always told it's a good reason though.

Changes

Kim Neste

Outside the birds began their morning song to the earth as the dew glistened in the first rays of the sun. Amanda rolled over the covers. Her eyes scanned the dimly lit room for the clock.

"Twenty after five, it's still early." She thought. As she stretched, her mind began to function. Amanda sat up and rubbed her blue eyes. She climbed out of her canopy bed and half stumbled across the pale pink carpet of her bedroom toward the window and opened its deeper pink shade. The now intense sunlight billowed into the half-empty room. Streams of light reflected off her mirror hitting the packed boxes which adorned the floor. She stretched again looking around. Her room looked almost violated. The bookcase was basically empty, only a few unwanted items remained on the shelves; her old piggy bank, an ancient game of checkers, a porcelain figure of a pink elephant, things she would simply discard.

"Things I won't need in my *new life* as mother keeps referring to it." She thought sarcastically.

Most of her clothes were packed already leaving her closet empty and lonely looking. Amanda walked toward her dresser. She ran her fingers across its smooth white top. The only thing left on it was her favorite picture of her and her best friend, Rachel. She picked up the beautiful pink and white frame the familiar picture was mounted in. Tears began to fill her eyes as she studied it. She had such an array of emotions while preparing her things to be moved into her new house.

Amanda's head was already swimming.

"How am I going to get through this?" She sobbed aloud. She felt dizzy. She had lived in her beloved home her whole life, sixteen years. She couldn't even fathom leaving it. Still she knew this move was inevitable. Her father was transferred, and it meant a raise for him, but money was the last thing on her mind.

All Amanda knew was that she would have to leave her home. She would have to switch schools and worst of all, leave all her friends. She and Rachel had been best friends since they were four years old and have been inseparable ever since.

Rachel was family. She even called Rachel's parents mom and dad. The idea of leaving was simply incomprehensible. She gently placed the picture back on her empty dresser.

Amanda left her room and walked down the hallway. She entered the bright yellow bathroom and brushed her long blonde hair back into a ponytail. She moped down the stairs toward the kitchen. Nobody else was awake. The house was completely still. She poured herself a glass of milk and sat at the kitchen table. She took a deep breath.

She had never really paid attention to all the

little things before. The smell of her home filled her nose, the smell was so sweet, but she couldn't quite describe it. That wonderful smell that she would look forward to when coming home, it was so comforting.

"Amanda, how long have you been up?" Her mother questioned. Amanda jumped up. She hadn't even heard her mom come downstairs.

"Not long." Amanda replied without much emotion. She watched her mother as she prepared the coffee. She had never really noticed how methodically her mom moved in her own kitchen. Her mother didn't even need to look, her hands knew exactly where to go to retrieve the coffee beans, exactly where to set the heat setting on the water tap. Amanda wondered if her mother would be lost in her new kitchen.

She looked around her at the yellow and brown kitchen trying to etch every exact detail in her mind. Her mom came over and sat next to her. She squeezed her hand tightly.

"Honey, have you finished your room yet?" She asked with concern.

"Almost, Mother!" Amanda exclaimed with disgust.

"I should just run away! You can't make me move! You can't. You just can't!" Her mother's face hardened.

"Oh, yes I can and I will!" Her mom screamed back as she pushed back hard on the chair and got up to get herself some coffee.

"I realize that this move is not easy for you, but I will not be threatened." Her tone began to soften.

"Honey, things will all work out, you'll see. You just have to give it a chance. You'll have a brand new life. You can make new friends at this school, and before you know it, it will feel like home to you."

"I don't want new friends or a new life. I like my life here. I like my friends here! I can't believe that you're doing this to me! Don't you care about me at all?" Amanda knew her mother was trying to be comforting, but she didn't care. This was her home and she loved it. She just wanted to stay where she was, where she belonged.

She left the kitchen table and walked into the family room. The drapes were still drawn and the room took on a gloomy atmosphere. She threw herself down on the couch. She rubbed her stocking feet into the plush cream carpeting. She sat in silence. Her mother didn't come into the room, neither to comfort nor to scold her. They both just sat in silence for a while, her mother in the kitchen sipping her morning coffee, and her in the family room. Her stomach began to ache as a wave of nausea came over her. She couldn't think straight anymore.

Her father's footsteps coming down the stairs broke the silence. She listened as he joined her mother in the kitchen.

"Well, should I even bother to say good morning?" He snickered. Their arguing must have woken him. Her mother had no reply for him. Amanda could hear him pouring some coffee for himself. He walked into the family room and opened the drapes. The vibrant sunlight poured into the room.

"Why are you sitting here in the dark? It's a beautiful day outside. The sun will cheer you up, sweetheart." Her father commented trying to prompt a happy conversation. Amanda didn't answer. She looked at her old swing set out the patio door. She had so much fun in her backyard. The cheerful memories of her childhood came rushing back.

"Are we taking that with us, Dad?" She asked as she pointed out the windowed door, already knowing the obvious answer. Her fa-

ther came over and sat next to her. He lay his hand on her shoulder.

"Sweetheart, I wish there was someway I could make this easier for you, but there just isn't." Amanda could see the regret in his eyes. She desperately wanted this to be easier too.

"There is no way to make this easy! Don't you see that?" She cried and ran back up the stairs to her bedroom, slamming her door behind her. She hastily threw on a pair of jean shorts and a pink shirt. She was crying so hard she could hardly breathe. She could hear her parents talking in hushed voices as she opened her door back up. She crept back down the stairs to the front door, put on her white tennis shoes, and snuck out.

She walked down her driveway, then turned to look at her home. The net on the basketball hoop which was mounted above their brown garage door was beginning to fray at the ends. She looked up at her bedroom window. The tears began streaming down her face again.

Amanda walked out of her court and began the five minute walk to Rachel's house. She tried to recall how many times she had made the trip.

"Must be thousands, at least too many to count." She thought. She approached the driveway, walked up to the front door, and rang the doorbell. Rachel opened the door and joined Amanda outside. They sat on the front stoop together. Amanda looked at her best friend, and tried to imagine not seeing her everyday. The two of them had spent almost every waking minute with each other ever since she could remember. She recalled all the sleep-overs, the parties, all the trips they made to the local pool to go swimming. She recalled all the phone conversations that went on for hours and hours and all the family vacations that she had taken with Rachel's family and she with hers. She remembered the weekly night ritual of picking out the outfits they would wear to school the next day, and then every morning going to Rachel's before leaving for school together. She reminisced fondly about all those cafeteria lunches and how they would always get detention for talking to each other or passing notes in study hall. And, of course, all those weekend trips to the mall to shop and, of course, to try to meet guys, not to forget the ordeal of rehearsing what to say to them when they would call.

"So, what's new?" Rachel asked pulling Amanda back into the present.

"Ha! Ha! Rachel this is really going to happen! What are we going to do?" Amanda begged for some sort of plan of action, but Rachel had none.

Together they slowly walked back to Amanda's home. As the two of them neared the house they could see the monster moving truck in the driveway. The two girls stopped just before reaching the driveway. They turned and looked at each other, both weeping. They embraced one another tightly as if they were holding on for dear life. They sobbed pathetically in each others arms for what seemed like hours, but at the same time only seemed like a fraction of a second. As they pulled away from each other they were silent. There was nothing more that could be said. They turned opposite directions from each other and walked away with out saying a word. Rachel walked home. Amanda sadly began to walk into her *new life*.

"Death's Hitman"

Chris Patton

"HOW DID I GET MYSELF INTO THIS?" Chaz wondered as he slipped through the pitch black of the moonless night. Every few steps, if you could call them steps, he painfully glared back over his shoulder, desperately searching for his adversary. Until now, he'd remained unseen, which made him that much more dangerous.

Chaz glanced down at what little remained of his left leg. There were wounds covering his whole body from the severe beating he'd endured, but his leg was by far the worst one. Torn flesh and blood dripped from the bones that now stuck out where his knee used to be. Below that, there was nothing. He was weak, he was confused, and to top it all off, his wings were getting tired. Aside from being physically worn out, Chaz was also angry. Angry at himself, he limped by unnoticed. Most of all, he was angry at The Master.

He remembered that morning very clearly. The Master had called him into the Grand Chamber and gave him . . . no told him . . . Ok, actually he ordered him to follow some loser kid around all day. Seemed like a simple task. Actually, it sounded like it would be fun. It would have been if "THEY" didn't think he was so important. No one expected him to be guarded so well. After all, he was just an ordinary snot-nosed kid. Heck, he'd only recently joined "THEIR" side. Of course The Master might have known, but if He did, He would have sent more than just one guy. Unless He just wanted to be sure. The though of being used as a guinea pig only fueled Chaz's anger more.

Now all Chaz was worried about was getting away from the guardian that he somehow must have gotten angry. He staggered down streets, half-hopping, half-flying, looking for sign of his hunter. For the past mile he hadn't seen or heard anything. Maybe he went back to guard the boy. It was possible he wouldn't pursue. After all, a lesson had been taught at the expense of a leg. He slowed down to rest and turned around to search behind himself.

Darkness. The darkness didn't matter though, his eyes could see through it. Nothing. He smiled to himself as he realized he must have gotten away. So what, one leg missing. At least he's still unbounded. Besides, the leg will grow back in time. Now all there is left to do is tell The Master what happened. For an instant he debated confronting Lucifer with his anger. But only for an instant. The Master didn't respond too well when his angels questioned Him. Instead he decided to thank The Master for the task he'd been given, even though it'd probably mean he'd get another one ten times worse than this one was.

With an evil chuckle Chaz turned, flapping his wings, and started home. He didn't even see the guardian's blade as it came slashing through the air towards his torso. The last thing he heard as he slipped into the Abyss of his death was the guardian's battle cry, "IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, DEMON BE GONE!" And as the darkness overtook his tattered body, he muttered one last word . . .

"Dangit . . ."

Here Again
Chris Patton

I've been here before,
Unsure and uncertain,
Not knowing what's right and what's wrong.
I've been here before,
But it has been a while.
So I'm not sure how to sing this song.
Last time I was here
My heart was hurt
But I still had a smile on my face.
Last time I was here
The best and the worst thing
Both happened to me in the same place.
I've been here before,
But I'm not really sure
What it was that I did to get here.
And since I've been here before,
I am afraid,
I'm afraid to be here again.

STRIKETHROUGH
Colleen Reid

STRIKETHROUGH
Burning, chaffing, third degree
set the young and lifeless free.
holding them idle, in Contempt,
the symmetry becoming exempt.
falling to Empty, then taking you in,
some of them fallen, some with a Vision.
a world of peace, we can't let go.
Stop.
what do we have to show-
    Blood, Pain, Anger, War
    Rage, Scars, Hunger, More,
        defeat.

we're out of control once more,
a battle on all but war.
a paradox within itself,
drowning out the CRIES FOR HELP.

Strikethrough.
as Empty as a soul can be
the souls Proclaimed by you and me,
STRIKETHROUGH, set them free,
if only you could see,
the World is our Baby.
Save the children.

never mind.

Be Satisfied With Me
Ann Sluis

I may not be built
    like Super-Model Cindy C,
But for your average girl,
    I think I have beauty;
I really don't care how others describe
    what they see,
It matters only what you think;

Be satisfied with me.
Don't go saying I'm beautiful
and take it back again,
Don't listen if your sister says that I am ugly;
I'm sure I'd never deal
with this from other men,
So, watch what you say
and just be satisfied with me.
Don't say I'm lovely
and then say you meant my heart.
Don't say what you don't mean,
it makes things much more easy;
If you can't pay an honest compliment,
maybe we're better off apart,
If you say I'm pretty don't take it back,
be satisfied with me.
You made me mad and made me cry
and tested the hell out of my trust,
You pushed me almost to my threshold point
and this is my final plea;
If you can't love me for all that I am
our relationship is as good as dust,
And I might as well just say good-bye
if you can't be satisfied with me.

Blind for Him

Ann Sluis

I look for the sun,
But it's too out of reach;
It lives in a dream,
But dies on the beach;
As I long for him.
The sun sets so high,
And sets off his hair;
But at dawn here I lie,
And I find him nowhere;
I look in his eyes,
But they fade into night;
I once was so wise,
But now I've lost my sight,
And I'm blind for him.

His Flame

Ann Sluis

I strolled past a line of trees
in the middle of a natural prairie
Until I found one tree
that left a perfect shadow,
And lilies of the valley and lilacs
and chrysanthemums
All made a perfect blanket for me
to envelope myself in
And sit back and reflect
and write my feelings about him.
How flustered my heart gets
when I think of how I first saw him,
Then met him, then learned of his identity;
How my heart stops beating, it seems,
each time I look at him in the eyes.
I hang on every word he says, it seems.
He captivates me with his intelligence,
his sense of humor, his

Unending pursuit of not just accepting things
until he finds out on his own inquiry.
He excites my soul, my heart, my mind,
to learn, to grow,
To challenge myself to be all
that I am and more.
He is becoming so dear and his life force
is like a flame in the night
And it seems it is flowing
like a St. Elmo's Fire into my heart.

Fortress

Ann Sluis

Both ventricles were boarded up,
Aortic valve was sealed within;
No more disappointment now,
No one leaves, and none get in.
Armor soldered in its place,
No kiss could pierce its sheath;
A mask lived on the surface,
And my true heart lived beneath.
I used to open up the door,
And show all my colors true;
But the Crayola pallet's been erased,
And I then shined a narrow hue.
But recently, an uprising,
Opened the vault once more;
And the fortress of a guarded heart,
Is now scattered on the floor.
And now my heart is open,
To many wonders long unseen;
And now I can love once more,
And no longer hide behind a screen.

The Haunted Love

Ann Sluis

Heartbeat races, pulse in flutter
With each rattle of the shutter
Creaks and moans rise from the floor
And a shadow moves before my door
Hair on my neck seems to stand on end
Is this spirit foe or is it friend?
The sight sends shivers down my back
And I nearly have a heart attack
Floating in the cold, dark room
her face emits the deepest gloom
With day light, the girl will fade
But she still returns with skies of jade
In an old article, browned from age
The obituary seemed to set the stage
A woman saw her loving husband die
A burglary attempt that went awry
So distraught, she passed on of broken heart
Could not stand, even in death to be apart
So, she roams the halls each and every night
Hoping that one day they will reunite.

In Him

Ann Sluis

In his eyes, I see a spirit, a soul, a sanity.
In his smile, I see a child, a friend,
a growing in my heart.
In his actions, I see a man, a companion,
something not seen before.
In this man, this friend, this person
once a stranger, I see my dreams.
This time in him I see joy.

Let Me Go
Ann Sluis

I threw away your pictures,
Tore the negatives;
Want to be far from you,
For as long as I may live.
I burned all your letters,
They gave a brilliant glow;
So please just stop calling me,
It's best you let me go.
I gave away your teddy bear,
From this past Valentine;
I want no memories of you,
To choke me at the vine.
You seem to think that I still care,
But I think that you should know;
I would rather see you go to hell.
So, please just let me go.

In Limbo
Ann Sluis

I'm lost and my identity has forgotten me,
I feel so turned around and flipped;
Now, all I have are my dreams of the sea,
From a land full of holes where I've tripped.
I'm searching, one life left behind
and one lies ahead,
I feel such a failure, so worthless and low;
This, my transition time, is screwing
with my head,
And I am afraid that I won't know
where to go.
I'm sad. I've left my friends so far behind
and they are so seldom seen,
And rarely do I speak with them
and I feel so sad;
I hear their voices now and then:
the answering machine,
Communicating with technology
is sometimes bad.
I'm scared. I'm supposed to be grown up
and responsible and on my own,
But that just isn't right, for I am just kid;
But, I see my age dictates that is am grown,
And to the child inside of me I must forbid.

Regretful Circumstances
Ann Sluis

Little things called minutes and miles
Are the one hindrance to my eternal bliss.
They separate me from the man that I love
From his sweet hug to his passionate kiss.
Unfortunate predicament suffocates the heart
That seems to breathe just when he is near,
And a dream that I carry like a weight
on the back
Because I can never be there,
he can never be here.
So two stars fly away on a cool autumn eve,
Sadly, so crossed, that love draws to its end;
And though I try to hope and try to believe,
I know I'm probably better off
if I just think him a "friend."

Twelve Years in the Making

Ann Sluis

She leans in to kiss his lips,
And he returns the favor;
Charm like his, so seldom seen,
A caliber to savor.
He takes little, returns much,
A caregiver to the end;
He is much more than her love,
He is also her best friend.
But every once in a while,
Her cheeks turn the reddest shade;
She mentally pictures him,
As the boy she met, third grade.
She can't help but laugh at this,
And he can't help but smirk;
He finds it humorous as well,
And how strange our God does work.

White Water

Ann Sluis

My heart remains in a tormented sea
The froth of white waters enveloping me
Flipped by current, sucked by the tide
With these crashing waves,
    my heart will abide
My soul remains in the frost of the lake
Icy white water, my life does it take
Frost bitten spirit, that cries at the floor
Locked in the frigidness forevermore
My mind is trapped by all of the memories
The town flashed back in my dreams
In the land of milk and cheese,
    I lost my very self and will
But in White Water,
    Wisconsin my heart is still

Zombie

Ann Sluis

The mesh, synapses, electrical;
Beyond doc's reach, not medical.
Wires crossed, brain in blitz;
Cerebral cortex is on the fritz.
Red like stop or green light go?
Yellow light: caution? We just don't know.
Aimless direction: A brain in disrepair.
System overload from a simple affair.
A crash in the hard drive,
    new problems to probe:
Information indigestion in the occipital lobe.
Eyes crossed from malfunction
    in a deeply recessed vault;
A message blinks subconsciously:
    Abort? Retry? Default?
And glassy eyes stare at the floor;
Comprehending nothing, ever more.
The zombie face looks hypnotized,
When, in fact, he's been lobotomized.

A Work in Process (Progress? Regress?)

John Stobart

Excerpt from journal, Feb. 21, 1997

Maybe I should write "Credo '96" as a companion for "Credo 6 or 9". That would be audacious.

Credo #6 or #9
Double-Helix — A Holy Sonnet

As cobalt lasers leech the bones to dawn:
Revolting worlds evolve and worm to life;
Earth's squirming birth affirms
Old Ether's spawn,
In viscose sea's amino-acid strife:
Being become finite in tomb and race;
An oozing harmony, the perfect hitch,
A fossil masking Plato's hide-in-face:
Reflection —
COSMIC ZEUS In COSMIC ITCH!

How tempting now to crash
this verse too thin:
My muse's mimic gold, not lyric flame!
Detect this surplus-woe as wisdom-skin,
Its body all silicone-will-for fame:
This sonnet's double-helix, spittle-spite—
Dancing gammas bent
on dawn's internal night.

—1969

Credo #96 (#1)

Some twenty-seven years ago, I wrote a sonnet. It was iambic pentameter and a blend of Petrarch and Shakespeare insofar as rhyme scheme and structure went. It was a sort of tribute to ambivalence and contrast, even an apostrophe could have been read either to allow contraction or possession, opposition or evolution. As yin-yang polarities of creative theory were explored. The metaphysical, ontological,epistemological, and mythopoetic parameters were definitely sexual, comic, pantheistic, nasty, and graphic. Somehow this poem seems more than twenty-seven years its elder.

—1997

Credo #9 or #6 (#2)
A trophy or Atrophy, A Golden Sonnet

In 1969, I wrote a holy sonnet
In pitch-perfect iambic pentameters
This Aesculapian probe I thought
a sacred bet
To win a place at last among my betters.

I wrote that rhyme should conquer time,
Ambivalence galore crooning metaphors.
I praised my sonnet's genius for crime
Profoundly drawn in cosmic abattoirs

My sextet spattered double-helix climbs
Up and down Plato's cave
to Zeus's comic itch
Contrasting fame's and evolution's slimes
Confessed to guilty envy for the rich.

Consider now my latest atrophy
And tell me now, sweet reader, what you
thinks of me!

Wordeater 98 Student Jury:
Nicolle Byrnside
Jeff Hicks
Bob Loewe
Gale Tolf

Awards
Prose ($5.00)
Wayne Berscheid
JeNeen Maselskis

Poetry ($5.00)
Jeff Adams
Jessica Canupp
E.L. Gallagher
Shawn McNeal
Ann Sluis

John Stobart is solely responsible for the awards.

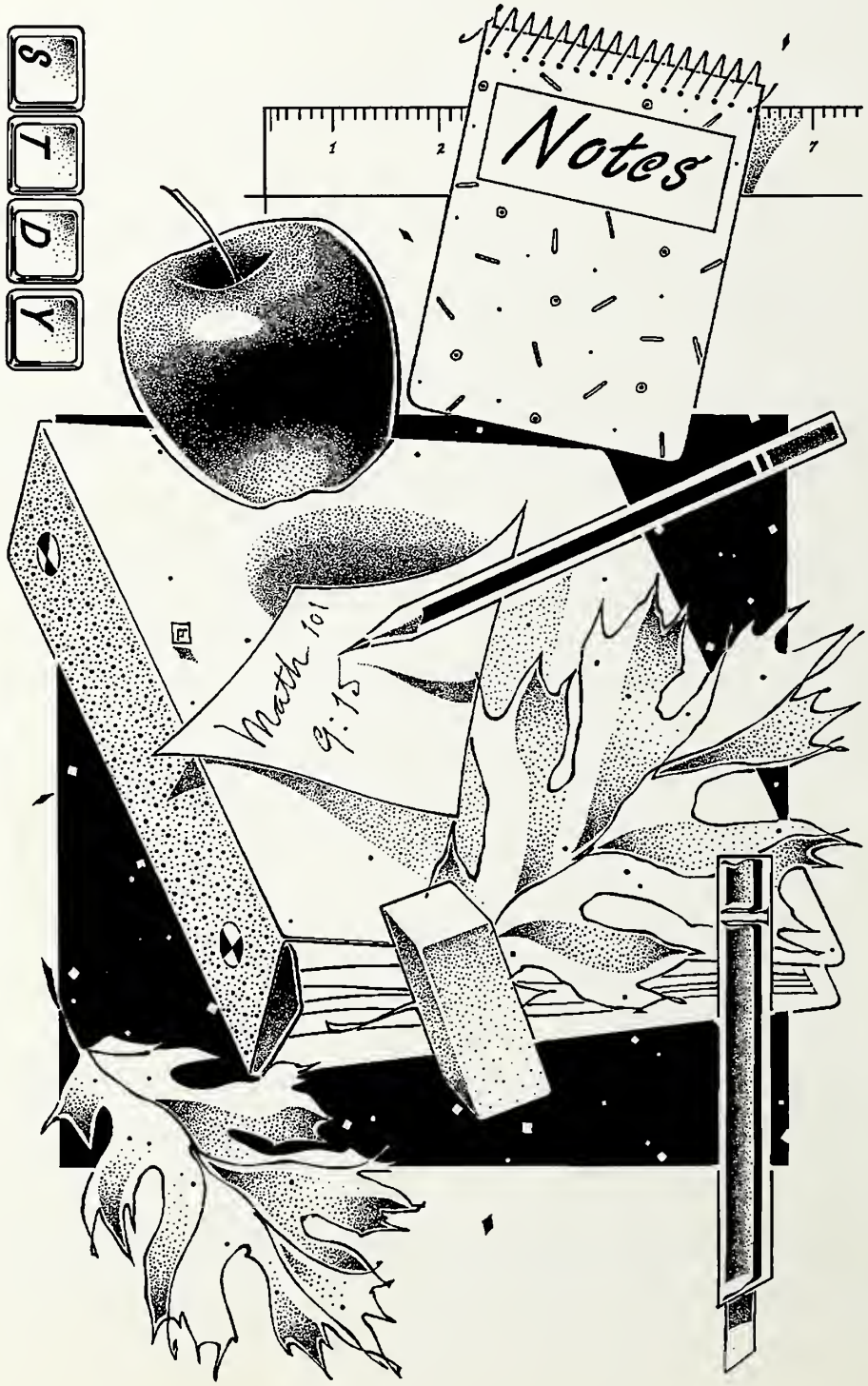
Submission Deadlines
Manuscript and cover designs
must be submitted to:
John Stobart, Room C-1069

by

October 15, 1997 - Wordeater 99
December 10, 1997 - Wordeater 100

Cover Designs submitted must be one inch margins all around.
Emphasis line. Use india ink.

This issue contains selections from students, faculty, alumni and friends of Joliet Junior College. Only current students are eligible for awards.

WORDEATER

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